Doris Lessing Under My Skin

1994

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DORIS LESSING
—FROM THE INSIDE OUT

"ONE OF THE 20TH CENTURY'S MOST IMPORTANT AND INFLUENTIAL NOVELISTS HERE PRESENTS A MEMOIR AS PROBING, UNSPARING AND DARKLY FUNNY AS HER FICTION."
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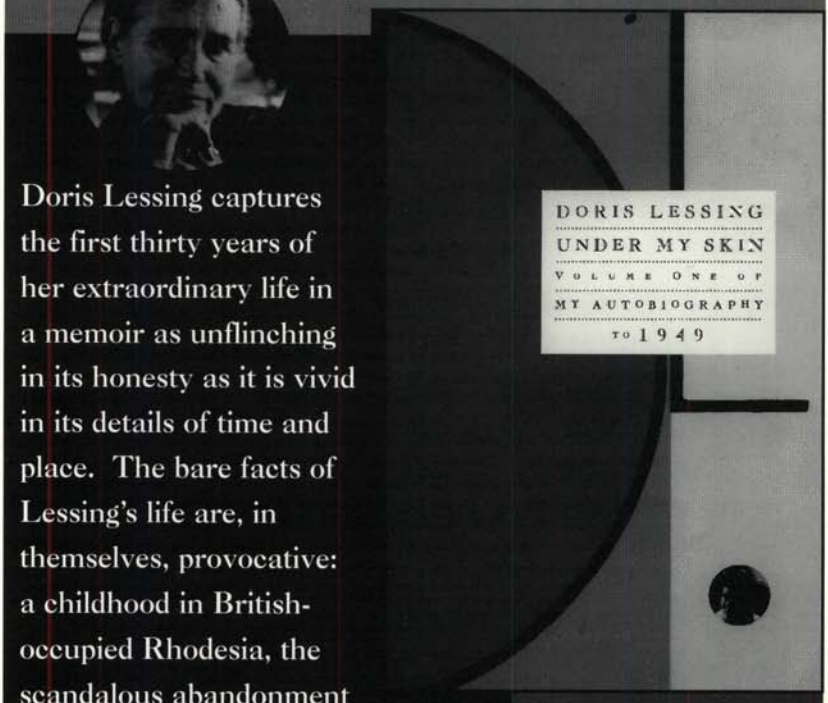

Doris Lessing captures the first thirty years of her extraordinary life in a memoir as unflinching in its honesty as it is vivid in its details of time and place. The bare facts of Lessing's life are, in themselves, provocative: a childhood in British-occupied Rhodesia, the scandalous abandonment of her first two children, and her rise to prominence as a writer—but it is her candid, insightful treatment of her own past that will earn this book its place as one of the touchstones of 20th century literature.

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DWIGHT MACDONALD The latest product of the craze for biography that produced Michael Wreszin's life of Dwight Macdonald has not enhanced the memory of Macdonald.* Mostly it is because it features his shortcomings rather than his assets. For one thing, his biographer makes Macdonald out to be a permanent rebel, like a kind of personification of Trotsky's permanent revolution. But this loses its meaning when all it seems to indicate is that Macdonald supported a variety of causes but always seemed to be in disagreement with his co-rebels. In fact, he was against any form of authority, even left-wing authority, but he was mainly against what he thought of as the established order, or the system. Of course it is not difficult to be this kind of permanent rebel. All you need is a private income or a tenured position. And being a rebel all one's life is more of an indulgence than a political program. Indeed it might be more appropriate to say that Macdonald was a permanent loner or dissident. He was out to *epatér* the establishment, including the establishment composed of radical causes or organizations. He had a yearning to be in a minority, even in a minority of one.

In addition, Wreszin details every twist and turn of Macdonald's thinking, on every conceivable issue. The trouble is that Macdonald was not primarily a theorist, though he assumed the posture of one. In fact, he was at his best when he was articulating the views of the serious intellectual community surrounding him. Thus, his best work came in the early days of *Partisan Review*, in the late thirties and early forties, when he was trashing the Communists and the fellow travellers and the culture that emerged from them.

Dwight's talent was as a journalist. Indeed, he was one of the finest of his time – witty, thorough, ingenious, inventive. He was at his best when he was a journalistic spokesman for the community of New York intellectuals gathered around *Partisan Review* in the thirties and forties. His anti-Communist pieces were superbly written. And his full-scale debunking of Henry Wallace was a *tour de force*. But later Macdonald became restless and began to look for new causes. At the time, socialism, at least as exemplified in the Soviet Union and in the Soviet satellites, was being questioned by the more sophisticated political intellectuals. They were not ready to jump on some new utopian bandwagon. Macdonald, however, with a few other disenchanted figures, such as Nicola Chiaramonte and Paul Goodman, made the leap to a kind of amalgam of morality and anarchism. No doubt, Macdonald's new magazine, *Politics*, which he edited after leaving *Partisan Review*, was lively and interesting, even

*_A Rebel in Defense of Tradition. The Life and_ Politics _of Dwight Macdonald._ By Michael Wreszin. Basic Books. $30.00.

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though it did not further abstract theory or practical thinking. But these panaceas, while being politically soothing, were little more than euphemisms for impossible solutions. In the end, Macdonald never let go of his moral and anarchist stances, but he embarked on a new career as a feature writer for *The New Yorker* and *Esquire*, where he could safely shock the system from within the system.

Clearly, Macdonald's biographer does him a disservice by elevating a series of rebellious impulses into an intellectual saga, presumably representative of the intellectual history of the period. Wreszin makes each of Macdonald's stages out to be much more than the temporary political flings that they were. For example, Wreszin makes too much of Macdonald's ostensible Trotskyism, in which Macdonald dabbled for a little while. He also inflates Macdonald's contributions to the question of mass and high culture. No doubt Macdonald wrote quite lucidly and sharply on the subject, but he was expanding on the ideas of Clement Greenberg and others. He borrowed heavily from Greenberg's famous piece, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," which appeared in *Partisan Review*.

I must also note several unfortunate errors in the biography, which could have been avoided if its author had consulted me before writing his book. One is the statement that the early *Partisan Review*, in its short existence as an organ of the John Reed Club, was funded by the Communists. This is untrue. The magazine never received a cent from the Communists nor, as a matter of fact, did the John Reed Club. I certainly knew the sources of our funding – which came from sales of the magazine and the proceeds of lectures – as I was on top of financial as well as literary matters at *Partisan Review*, and I was secretary of the John Reed Club, which, according to the Soviet model, was the top position. (Costs of publication at the time were very low.) The other error has to do with the source of the money necessary to put out the next issue of the magazine when we broke with Macdonald. This fact is documented in my memoir, *A Partisan View*.

Other aspects of the biography are also debatable. For example, while Wreszin does talk about Macdonald's anti-Semitism, in the end he plays it down. Actually, I am convinced it was an indelible component of Macdonald's character and one of his weapons in his competitive struggle with Philip Rahv, Delmore Schwartz, and myself. In fact, one day he tellingly blurted out to us in the heat of an argument, "You Jews are no smarter than we are."

Despite these faults, the biography is a work of great diligence, and it is full of a good deal of documentary material about intellectual life during much of this last century. It is too bad, however, that the prose is not always up to the high standards of Macdonald's own writing. **W. P.**

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DORIS LESSING

Under My Skin

You cannot sit down to write about yourself without rhetorical questions of the most tedious kind demanding attention. Our old friend, the Truth, is first. The truth . . . how much of it to tell, how little? It seems it is agreed this is the first problem of the self-chronicler, and obloquy lies in wait either way.

Telling the truth about yourself is one thing, if you can, but what about the other people? I may easily write about my life until the year I left Southern Rhodesia in 1949, because there are few people left who can be hurt by what I say; I have had to leave out, or change – mostly a name or two – very little. So Volume One is being written without snags and blocks of conscience. But Volume Two, that is, from the time I reached London, will be a different matter, even if I follow the example of Simone de Beauvoir who said that about some things she had no intention of telling the truth. (Then why bother? – the reader must be expected to ask.) I have known not a few of the famous, and even one or two of the great, but I do not believe it is the duty of friends, lovers, comrades, to tell all. The older I get the more secrets I have, never to be revealed and this, I know, is a common condition of people my age. And why all this emphasis on kissing and telling? Kisses are the least of it.

I read history with conditional respect. I have been involved in a small way with big events, and know how quickly accounts of them become like a cracked mirror. I read some biographies with admiration for people who have chosen to keep their mouths shut. It is, I have observed, a rule that people who have been on the periphery of events or a life are those to rush forward to claim first place: the people who do know often say nothing or little. Some of the most noisy, not to say noisome, scandals or affairs of our time, that have had a searchlight on them for years, are reflected wrongly in the public mind because the actual participants keep their counsel and watch, ironically, from the shadows. And there is another thing, much harder to see. People who have been real movers and exciters get left out of histories, and it is because memory itself decides to reject them. These instigators are flamboyant, unscrupulous, hysterical, or

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Editor's Note: This essay is excerpted from the book *Under My Skin* by Doris Lessing, to be published in October by HarperCollins. Copyright © 1994 by Doris Lessing. Used by arrangement with HarperCollins Publishers.

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even mad, certainly abrasive; but the real point is that they are apparently of a different substance from the smooth, reasonable and sane people who have been inspired by them, and who do not like to remember temporary submersions in lunacy. Often, reading histories there are events which stick out, do not make enough sense, and one may deduce the existence of some lunatic, male or female, who was equipped with the fiery stuff of inspiration – but was quickly forgotten, since always and at all times the past gets tidied up and made safer. "A rough beast" is usually the real begetter of events. There would have been no "communist party" in Southern Rhodesia without such an inspirational character.

Women often get dropped from memory, and then history.

Telling the truth or not telling it, and how much, is a lesser problem than the one of shifting perspectives, for you see your life differently at different stages, like climbing a mountain while the landscape changes with every turn in the path. Had I written this when I was thirty, it would have been a pretty combative document. In my forties, a wail of despair and guilt: oh my God, how could I have done this or that? Now I look at that child, that girl, that young woman, with a more and more detached curiosity. Old people may be observed peering into their pasts, *Why?* – they are asking themselves. *How did that happen?* I try to see my past selves as someone else might, and then put myself back inside one of them, and am at once submerged in a hot struggle of emotion, justified by thoughts and ideas I now judge wrong.

Besides, the landscape itself is a tricky thing. As you start to write at once the question begins to insist: Why do you remember this and not that? Why do you remember in every detail a whole week, month, more, of a long ago year, but then complete dark, a blank? *How do you know that what you remember is more important that what you don't?*

Suppose there is no landscape at all? This can happen. I sat next to a man at dinner who said he could never write an autobiography because he didn't remember anything. What, nothing? Only a little scene here and there. Like, so he said, those small washes and blobs of colour that stained glass windows lay on the dark of a stone floor in a cathedral. It is hard for me to imagine such a darkening of the past. Once even to try would have plunged me into frightful insecurity, as if memory were Self, Identity – and I am sure that isn't so. Now I can imagine myself arriving in some country with the past wiped clean out of my mind: I would do all right. It is after all only what we did when we were born, without memories, or so it seems to the adult: then we have to create our lives, create memory.

"Besides" – said this dinner companion – who seemed perfectly whole and present, despite his insufficient hold on his past, "the little

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blobs of colour move all the time, because the sun is moving outside."

True. Move they do. You forget. You remember. As I brooded over the material for this book, faces and places emerged from the dark. "Good Lord! So there you are! Haven't thought about you for years!" Not only the perspective but what you are looking at changes.

When you write about anything – in a novel, an article – you learn a lot you did not know before. I learned a good deal writing this. Again and again I had to say, "That was the reason was it? Why didn't I think of it before?" Or even, "Wait . . . it wasn't like that." Memory is a careless and lazy organ, not only a self-flattering one. And not always self-flattering. More than once I have said: "No, I wasn't as bad as I've been thinking," as well as discovering that I was worse.

And then – and perhaps this is the worst deceiver of all – we make up our pasts. You can actually watch your mind doing it, taking a little fragment of fact and then spinning a tale out of it. No, I do not think this is only the fault of the story-tellers. A parent says, "We took you to the seaside, and you built a sand castle, *don't you remember?* – look, here is the photo." And at once the child builds from the words and the photograph a memory, which becomes hers. But there are moments, incidents, real memory, I do trust. This is partly because I spent a good part of my childhood "fixing" moments in my mind. Clearly I had to fight to establish a reality of my own, against an insistence from adults that I should accept theirs. Pressure had been put on me to admit that what I knew was true was not. So I am deducing this. Why else my preoccupation that went on for years: *this* is the truth, *this* is what happened, hold on to it, don't let them talk you out of it.

Why an autobiography at all? Self-defense: biographies are being written. It is a jumpy business, as if you were walking along a flat and often tedious road in an agreeable half-dark but you know a searchlight may be switched on at any minute. Yes, indeed there are good biographers, nearly all of them in Britain now, for we are enjoying a golden age of biography. What is better than a really good biography? Not many novels.

In the year just finished, 1992, I heard of five American biographers writing about me. One I have never met or even heard of. Another, I was told by a friend in Zimbabwe, is "collecting material" for a biography. From whom? Long dead people? A woman I met twice, once when she asked me carefully casual questions, has just informed me she has written a book about me which she is about to get published. Yet another can only be concocting a book out of supposedly autobiographical materials in novels and from two short monographs about my parents. Probably interviews, too, and these are always full of misinformation. It is an astonishing fact that you may spend a couple of hours with an interviewer,

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who is recording every word you say, but the article or interview always has several major errors of fact. But less and less do facts matter, partly because writers are like pegs to hang people's fantasies on. If writers do care that what is written about them should somewhere connect with the truth, does that mean we are childish? Perhaps it does, and certainly I feel every year more of an anachronism. Returning to Paris after a year's interval, I was interviewed by a young woman who had done me before. I said her previous article had been a tissue of invention, and she replied: "But if you have to get an article in to a deadline, and you didn't have enough material, wouldn't you make it up?" Clearly she would not have believed me if I had said no. And that brings me straight to the heart of the problem. Young people brought up in today's literary climate cannot believe how things were. You get skeptical looks if you say something like this: "Once serious publishers tried to find serious biographers for their serious authors." Now everyone takes it for granted that all they are concerned about is to publish as many biographies as possible, no matter how second-rate, because biographies sell well. Writers may protest as much as they like: but our lives do not belong to us.

If you try and claim your own life by writing an autobiography, at once you have to ask, But is this the truth? There are aspects of my life I am always trying to understand better. One – what else? – my relations with my mother, but what interests me now is not the narrowly personal aspect. I was in nervous flight from her ever since I can remember anything, and from the age of fourteen I set myself obdurately against her in a kind of inner emigration from everything she represented. Girls do have to grow up, but has this battle always been so implacable? Now I see her as a tragic figure, living out her disappointing years with courage and with dignity. I saw her then as tragic, certainly, but was not able to be kind. Every day you may watch, hear of, some young person, usually a girl, giving parents, often a mother, such a bad time that it could be called cruelty. Later they will say, "I am afraid I was difficult when I was an adolescent." A quite extraordinary degree of malice and vindictiveness goes into the combat. Judging from histories and novels from the past, things were not always like this. So what has happened, why now? Why has it become a right to be unpleasant?

I have a woman friend who in the Second World War went to New York with her young child, having no support in Britain, her home. She earned her living precariously as a model for artists, and sometimes modeling clothes. She lived in a small town outside New York. She was poor, isolated, and being twenty years old, yearned for some fun. Once, just once, exactly once, she left the little boy with a friend, spent the evening in New York and did not get home until dawn. I used to listen to this boy, now adolescent, accuse her most bitterly. "You left me alone

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night after night and went off to enjoy yourself." A small boy, the son of parents who did not approve of smacking, had his fingers smacked once when he persisted in putting them through the paper covering jam pots. This became, "And you used to hit me when I was small." These petty recollections are to the point.

For years I lived in a state of accusation against my mother, at first hot, then cold and hard, and the pain, not to say anguish, was deep and genuine. But now I ask myself, against what expectations, what promises, was I matching what actually happened? And this is the second area of my preoccupation, which has to be linked with the first.

Why is it I have lived my whole live with people who are automatically against authority, "agin the government," who take it for granted that all authority is bad, ascribe doubtful or venal motives to government, the Establishment, the ruling class, the local town council, the headmaster or mistress? So deep-rooted is this set of mind that it is only when you begin to climb out of it you see how much of your life has been determined by it. This week I was with a group of people of mixed ages, all on the left (or who had been once), and someone happened to mention that the government was doing something – quite a good thing, but that isn't the point – and at once every face put on a look of derision. Automatic. Push-button. This look is like a sneer or jeer, a *Well, what can one expect?* It can only come out of some belief, one so deep it is well out of sight, that a promise has been made and then betrayed. Perhaps it was the French Revolution? Or the American Revolution, which made the pursuit of happiness a right with the implication that happiness is to be had as easily as taking cakes off a supermarket counter. Millions of people in our time behave as if they have been made a promise – by whom? when? – that life must get freer, more honest, more comfortable, always better. Has advertising only set our minds more firmly in this expectant mode? Yet nothing in history suggests that we may expect anything but wars, tyrants, sickness, bad times, calamities, while good times are always temporary. Above all, history tell us nothing stays the same for long. We expect gold at the foot of always renewable rainbows. I feel we have been part of some mass illusion or delusion. Certainly part of mass beliefs and convictions that now seem as lunatic as the fact that for centuries expeditions of God-lovers trekked across the Middle East to kill the infidel.

I have just read of an historian who claims that the distrust, even contempt, of government is precisely because of the First World War, because of the stupidity and incompetence of its generals, because of the slaughter of Europe's young men.

When journalists or historians come to ask about something in the past, the hardest moment is when I see in their faces the look that means,

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But how *could* you have believed this, or done that? Facts are easy. It is the atmospheres that made them possible that are elusive. "You see, we believed . . ." (You must have been pretty stupid then!) "No, you don't understand, it was such a fevered time . . ." (Fever you call it, do you!) "I know it's hard to understand, without being immersed in the poisonous air of then."

A subsidiary question, not without general relevance: how to account for the fact that all my life I've been the child who says the Emperor is naked, while my brother never, not once, doubted or criticized authority?

Mind you, a talent for seeing the Emperor's nakedness can mean his other qualities are not noticed.

I am trying to write this book honestly. But were I to write it aged eighty-five, how different would it be?

§ § §

And what were we selling? What the *Guardian* and other Communist or near-left newspapers said about the Soviet Union was untrue, though some people bought the paper precisely because of the "political analyses." But the articles and information about the situation of the Africans, the Coloured people, the Indians, were true. No other newspaper in Southern Africa had anything like it, for all were at best at the level of "we must improve their conditions for the sake of our self-interest," "they don't appreciate what we do for them" or "they only understand a good hiding." What most people found upsetting about the *Guardian* was not the Soviet Union – after all our gallant ally under good old Uncle Joe – it was the attitude about the Africans, still called "kaffirs" or "munts" – "natives" if someone tried to be polite.

What did we believe, what were the ideas that fueled us? They were the same as those of Communists or near-Communists everywhere, not just the hectic fancies of a hotch-potch of young lunatics thrown together by war in Africa.

First, that, within ten years, well fifteen then, the whole world would be Communist, from choice, because of the manifest superiorities of Communism. There would be no race prejudice, oppression of women, exploitation of labor – no snobbishness or contempt for others. This paradise would follow a brief period of resistance by reactionaries, only a minority, after all, because by then "the State would have withered away." This phrase "the withering away of the State," together with "the contradictions of capitalism," were by far the most common source of the sardonic jokes with which the comrades everywhere indicated they were not lost to sanity.

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Paradise, then, was on the world's agenda, and soon. Who would lead the world thither? Why, we would, people like us, Communists, vanguards of the working class, destined by History for the role. Exactly the same mind-set as my parents, who believed they represented God's will, working by agency of the British Empire, for the good of the world. Or like the framers of the Atlantic Charter.

Secondly, that there was no way to paradise but by Revolution. We despised anyone who did not believe in revolution – that is, with few exceptions. (We would assure each other, voices full of the sincerity that goes with moral judgments, that such and such a reactionary was nevertheless *a good person*.) It was morally superior to believe in Revolution, and those who did not were, at the least, cowardly. We were united with each other by superiority of character, because we were revolutionaries and good. Our opponents were bad. People who did not believe in socialism were not credited with good intentions: a set of mind that continues to this day. It is satisfying to believe in the moral inferiority of opponents. That the people supporting the United Party in Southern Rhodesia or the Tories in Britain might actually believe their policies would be best for humankind was simply not admitted. So strong is this need to believe oneself better that, as recently as 1992, after all the storms of murder, torture, deliberate genocide committed by the Communists, a female Red reproached me with: "How can you turn your back on the Truth? *I thought you were a good person*."

Thirdly, we were a part of a family that covered the world. "A Communist can arrive in any country anywhere and at once be at home, with people who think the same, with the same ideals." An enticing notion for people estranged from their families, or uprooted – and these days most are. I heard exactly the same from a Moslem friend. "A Moslem can go anywhere in the world and at once be with people who think exactly the same: don't forget, the Koran is the mental and moral framework for every Moslem, and the stories and the sacred and historical figures in it are shared by the Sheik of Kuwait and the poor laborer digging the ditch in Indonesia."

Fourthly, a Communist should always be better than everyone else, work harder, study more, look after people, always be ready to do the dirty work, both as a human responsibility and to attract people into the Communist Party, which embodied now, and would embody in the future, all the best qualities of humankind. This set of mind is religious. In the West, Christianity has shaped our thinking for two thousand years. Poor humanity lives in a vale of tears and suffering (capitalism), but is saved by a Redeemer (Christ, Lenin, Stalin, Mao, etc.), and after a period of pain and confusion (purgatory) there will be Heaven where all conflict

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will cease. (The State will wither away, Justice will reign.)

It was a main article of faith that great men (or women) did not influence the tides of history. I have forgotten how this particular error was categorized. A left-wing deviation? A *petit bourgeois* distortion? Just to make sure the point is not lost, this was in the time of Stalin and Hitler and of Mussolini. Not to mention Churchill.

We believed there would never again be nationalist wars or religious wars. Nationalism was obviously a thing of the past. So was religion. We used to congratulate each other: at least we can never have a religious war again, or a nationalist war.

We were supposed to believe – it was the "line" – that an interest in people's emotions or motives was "Freudian" and reactionary.

Only "proletarian" literature was "correct."

We took it for granted that when the working class – or the blacks or any other disadvantaged people – took power, they would be inspired by only the purest and most disinterested ideals. Of all the absurd things we believed this was probably the worst. If anyone dared to murmur about "human nature" we would reason patiently with them, explaining they had not understood the regenerative and transforming powers of Communism.

The most powerful idea, the one that underpinned all the others, taken for granted, and not even discussed, was that capitalism was doomed, had been voted out by history itself. This frightful war was the creation of capitalism: capitalism spelled war, socialism was inherently peaceful. capitalism had created the last war, and the great Depressions in Britain, in Europe, in America – the Depression had formed most of the people who came to the Left Club. When we had a lecture on the Depression, the speakers and most people in the audience spoke from personal experience of unemployment and hard times, and passionate discussion went on until long after midnight in the spirit of what we now call *bearing witness:* "I testify that this is how things were." The books everyone had read included *The Grapes of Wrath, Love on the Dole, How Green Was My Valley*, plays like *Waiting for Lefty* and Lillian Hellman's plays. We sang:

I built a railroad, now it's done,
Buddy, will you spare a dime.

The physical results of the Depression in Britain were evident to anyone who had watched the RAF arrive in the Colony: the officers were a good foot or more taller than the Other Ranks, who were the product of a diet of bread and margarine and jam and strong tea. Capitalism was a killer and that was all that could be said about it.

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We knew that anyone connected with business, of any kind, was morally inferior. "Businessman" was a term of contempt. The portrait of the Wilcox family in E. M. Forster's *Howards End* as crude and philistine barbarians says it all. So does my picture of Richard in *The Golden Notebook*. I think this attitude was reinforced by the English aristocratic contempt for "trade," which had percolated down to levels far from its beginnings. Yet "business," trade, capitalism in short, was, in our canon, at times necessary and good. I do not remember that we made any attempt to reconcile, or even discuss, these "contradictions."

The most powerful ideas are the ones which are taken for granted. When people say now, But how *could* you have gone along with Communism, with the Soviet Union, knowing the situation there? – what is forgotten is that in our minds there was no alternative to Communism or socialism. Capitalism was dead, it was only a matter of time. The future was socialist, was Communist. Any "errors" committed by the Soviet Union – the great exemplar – would be put right, they were only bumps along the socialist road.

We enter dubious and foggy regions with "You knew what was going on." In this country, Rhodesia, our contempt for the Press was total. Its attitudes towards the key question, treatment of the black population, were simply absurd. Five minutes with the *Rhodesia Herald* was enough to restore our faith in our ideas. When we used the phrase "the lies of the capitalist press" we had good reason. When the people from Britain talked about the "capitalist press" they meant newspapers that had supported the betrayal of the legitimate Spanish government, inertia as Hitler took power, equivocations or lies about Hitler's treatment of the Jews.

When people talked about the Purges or the Collectivization, and the resulting millions of deaths, we did not believe the figures. The capitalist press was concerned to blacken the nascent Communist paradise, and that was all there was to it.

Now I think all this is off the point. I have known now a good many people who have gone through the process, first devout Communist, then adjustments to various degrees of doubt, described by Arthur Koestler as "coins dropping one by one out of your pocket" (interesting, that, coins equated with ideas), then sadness or depression, then loss of faith. This can take a long time. But why does it? – That's the point. There are people – but that goes with a certain kind of personality – who have a sudden reverse conversion, shedding Communist ideas (perhaps the right word is emotions) overnight. They are few. Most dawdled and drifted out of Communism, out of "The Party." For some people this was not painful. It was not for me. What I suffered from mostly was fear of epithets like "turncoat" and "renegade" – a powerful weapon indeed. But I

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was never committed with all of myself to Communism. I know this by comparing myself with some who were. The tragic figures were those very poor boys and girls who found in Communism a hope, a way of life, a family, a university – a future. Some came out of the poor families of London's East End, and joined the Young Communist League. For them Communism was everything, and when they lost their faith they were being deprived of everything that was best in life. Some died. Some had serious breakdowns. They were – but really – never the same again.

The question should be put like this: *if a person takes on a faith – political or religious – surrendering individuality in an inner act of submission to authority, then how long does it take to regain emotional* (I am deliberately not saying intellectual) *autonomy? There must be some psychological law that determines this, which has nothing to do with reason, with the rational level of a person*. In my case it took years to shed it all, and I was not committed with all of myself, as some people I knew were – and a few still are. That to me is the real question, yet to be answered. A person says: I left when the Soviet Union invaded Finland . . . because of the Hitler-Stalin Pact . . . because of the suppression of the rising in Berlin . . . because of the invasion of Hungary . . . because I learned the truth about the Purges and Collectivization. But meanwhile they are still subject to this psychological law, whatever it is.

More influential in the long run than all these attitudes, some defined and debated, others implicit, was something persuasive that united them all, the atmosphere of sentiment created by the 1917 Revolution, and which has remained to this day, the Soviet Union as an idea, as the great exemplar. A generation, two, three, in the West, have absorbed an attitude towards the Soviet Union which seems able to survive any number of "revelations." Exactly at the time when Gorbachev was explaining to the whole world about the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union, literally and morally, a group of young people were demonstrating outside a theater in London on the grounds that the play was "anti-Soviet." But the play's statements were mild compared to the truths emerging from the debates in their Alma Matter. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, there were many newspapers who would not criticize, and many did not begin to mention the Soviet atrocities in that country until the Soviet Union criticized itself. This phenomenon, the long-lasting, the pervasive myth of the Soviet Union's role as a beacon to all humankind, can be very well studied in the story of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and media attitudes to it.

In our little group, in 1943, 1944, the inner "contradictions" – a word we used continually – began to tear it apart almost as soon as it was created. Frank Cooper was the destructive yeast. Gottfried and Ken, de-

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ciding that our level of political awareness was inadequate, said we should have more Political Education. Frank despised theory, and left taking the RAF comrades with him – that is, the ones who had started with us. Another reason took a long time to see. Most of us had come to socialism by way of literature - night classes, personal and private adventures with books; we at any rate were soaked in the Great Tradition – which was European here, not merely British. In short, we found the language and slogans of Communism increasingly infantile, though we would not have said so. Within two years after the group began, most of its members were new, and soon the organization itself slowly fell apart. Which did not mean we did not think of ourselves as Communists. Frank Cooper had been posted back to England, he said because of his politics: perhaps, perhaps not. Some pilots had finished their training and had gone – new ones arrived. Many refugees, attracted because of the intellectual poverty of Salisbury, came to the Race Relations and Left Club meetings. In short, only a few of the original members, the founders, were left.

Now I wish I had photographs, but we were too busy and, in any case, too high-minded for such *petit bourgeois* activities. I can imagine it: "I'd like to take a snap of us all, do you mind?" What sneers, what jeers. Besides, the photograph could fall into the hands of the CID. We were all paranoid – pleasurable, on the whole: it gives one importance to think the Secret Service are preoccupied with your doings.

No photographs, but I did see myself not long ago. At a big meeting in London, I forget what for, there she came, skipping down the aisle, a young woman vibrating with physical energy and the confidence that comes of feeling oneself in control, dark-eyed, dark-haired with a red mouth – bright lipstick having come back into fashion. She held a pile of leaflets, and was dealing them out as she came to the young people with her. She emanated the debater's combativeness. At a word she would face her antagonist, eyes fixed on an invisible prompt, and irrefutable facts and figures would be propelled from her mouth by the force of her pure conviction. Her sincerity was perfect. There she was. There I had been. She was a member of some fascist group, and she had come to heckle and shout. No, no, I am not saying Communists are the same as Fascists, heaven forbid. We believed in the infinite perfectibility of humankind, the imminent triumph of kindness and love – our myth was the same as the religious one, so how could we be the same as racists, cynics and oppressors? When those Keepers of Accounts in the skies remark, "Well, in *fact* the atrocities, the murders and the destruction caused by the Communists were much more than those of the Nazis and Fascists," will They put on our side of the scale that weight engraved, Good Intentions? An interesting little debate . . .

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Our hearts were permanently swollen with compassion for the world. Any leisure moments between meetings or selling newspapers or "working on" some "contact" would find us sitting in a cheap café, talking about beautiful futures, our dreams fueled by the sick rage we lived in because of the frightful war which we all believed could have been prevented. And in any case, we were "defending the bad against the worst." Quite soon there wouldn't be any more war – like our parents, like my father, we believed this had to be the last because war would have been seen – at last – to be so destructive. We would watch some ragged black child loitering on the pavement, looking in at the amazing riches of this eating place, and we would assure each other that quite soon, such children would not exist. We lived on heroic myths and fantasies. The Storming of the Bastille – only recently has it emerged that there were only seven people in it and they were quite well treated: we imagined ourselves swarming up grim walls, to release starving prisoners. The Storming of the Winter Palace – we identified with heroic revolutionaries, not a mob drinking themselves sick on the wines in the cellars. From inside Nazi Europe came stories of heroic resistance, brave words on the gallows, escapes to freedom in Switzerland, the feats of the French Resistance. Yugoslavia was a potent symbol: we knew that Tito, snubbed by the British Government, but recognized by Churchill, was fighting a heroic war as pure and noble as the Battle of Britain. Of the myths that fed us, only the Long March has survived untarnished.

Something else began almost from the start, so low on our agenda we hardly noticed it. When I sold the *Guardian* around the Coloured quarter, once a week, I was for the afternoon immersed in "toe-rag" poverty, streets and courts crammed with people who were listless, drunk, demoralized. They grabbed at the newspapers as if they were tickets to the Promised Land – America. A sick man, his eyes running pus, sits in the sun, grabs my skirt. "Missus, missus, sit and pray with me, sit and pray." But I do not believe in prayer. "I don't think that's going to help you much," I say, gracious, matey. "But I'll tell my friend Mary who's on the Church Committee – she'll come and see you." "When will she come?" "Soon." "Tell her to come quick-quick, I'm sick."

In a small town all the members of the "caring" organizations – a word not yet born - knew each other. We might be Reds and Revolutionaries, tales told by the good citizens about us might make their flesh creep, but some of us were also members of the network of welfare workers. Informally, that is. When I left those poor and sorrowful streets I might spend a couple of hours ringing Welfare, various churches, the Education and Housing and Health departments. "There's a woman with three children, her husband has left her, do you think you could . . ."

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"Can do. What's the house number? Thanks a lot." "There's a coloured child not going to school at Number 43 Selous Court." "Hey, is that you Tigger man? Leave it with me."

When we sold the *Guardian* in the Coloured quarter we did not ask for money, and were criticized in the group.

"Since when do we stand for charity, comrades?"

"Oh for God's sake, have a heart, comrade, you make me sick sometimes."

This comrade was more often than not Gottfried. He was always the embodiment of cold, cutting, Marxist logic, and his favorite phrase was "And now let us analyse the situation." His analyses at least exposed the bones of a situation, and even now, bombarded with information or rhetoric I find myself summoning the ghost of that voice, and I think: Well then, right, so do let's analyse the situation.

Another man, who was not among the founders, increasingly earned irritated dislike. He was newly from England, part of that bureaucracy that ran one of the RAF camps, a tall, thin, handsome young man, and all the women had a brief crush on him. He was the very essence of young working-class hero. In fact he was putting it on, as was the way then; he was middle-class. Like Gottfried he was always analysing situations, and in fact was made Political Education Officer for a time. He presented himself as a fanatic, Lenin's progeny, was serious, unsmiling, and sat apart, making tidy notes and consulting authorities, Lenin, Stalin. He would sit listening critically while Gottfried analysed something, and then deliver judgment, not necessarily in his favor. There was a meeting about the situation in South Africa – that is, an inner or secret meeting. It is I think worth recording that then, the early 1940s, the political situation in South Africa, the treatment of Africans, Coloureds and Indians, was judged by us as so cruel that there was a revolutionary situation which must shortly explode in a blood-bath. We might spend whole evenings discussing how we could aid this process, "when the moment comes." The Chamber of Mines had put forward some proposal for its labour force. This comrade, John Miller his name was, sat silent long enough to get our attention, and then: "In situations like this, comrades, it is enough to ask ourselves, What would the Chamber of Mines want? What would be their priority? Establish that fact and then . . ." A pause, while the tension mounts. He smiles coolly, "And then it goes without saying that our line must be the opposite." Storms of applause. Yes, this was indeed the level of our political thinking.

But the storms of applause were already much less. In fact, this young hero had come in when things were falling apart, or at least changing. Now I see that if we had really been a Communist group, in a

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Communist country perhaps, then this man would have seriously challenged Gottfried. He would have been that forever recurring figure, the second in command (whether organizationally so or by virtue of personality), who splits the organization. Like Frank Cooper, he would have taken half the "cadres" with him, formed a rival group, and calumniated those left behind. Ken Graham took no part in power struggles. His was the voice of moderation, that person who absorbs animosity and discord, who stabilizes a group, often using humour to do it. He was essentially a Labour Party personality, and when he got back to England, that is what he joined.

Long decades later I came to know a man with much experience of the process of government, and he said that most revolutionaries could be diffused by offering them jobs. Nearly all are people of unused or underused capacity. They do not realize that what they are suffering from is frustration. The job offered must be chosen carefully, without cynicism, giving room for this natural critic's talents for useful reform. If this idea had been put to me then I would have dismissed it with a string of contemptuous epithets, but now I wonder if it isn't true.

If there is one thing hard to be dispassionate about, looking back, it is the amount of contempt and dislike we projected on to everyone not actually one of us. "Who is not with us is against us." Religion again: it is rooted in the self-congratulations of religion. Communist, left-wing, revolutionary groups generally legitimize envy. Nowhere is this more easily seen than in attitudes to art and literature.

In countries with a Communist Party, there is a framework – more, a formula – for the need to cut down, destroy, denigrate, established artists. If Thomas Mann or Proust is a lickspittle lackey of the ruling class, then that disposes of *him* – and the field is clear for the talents of the critic who often aspires to be a writer. The writers (or painters) swept out of the way are always the ones still on the scene, the generation just before the critic's. The classics are safe – they may be venerated, for they are dead. This process has been at work in country after country in our time. When there is no Communist Party, no intellectually respectable place to put envy, and the need to slash and burn predecessors, then the denigration may take nationalist forms. He - or she - is fouling the nest, has turned his back on the homeland, because he lives abroad, or (feminist) is male, or (male) her writing is of interest only to women. Or it is a time when there is no organized or institutionalized place to put envy, and then the phenomenon may be seen for what it is. Sometimes you will see a review or critical piece in a newspaper or journal written by a new name, and it is radiant, incandescent, with hatred for the writer's elders. You know this person has just come out of university, has been given a job by an uncle,

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aunt, lover, friend, and is intoxicated with power: writers he or she has spent long years in university learning to admire may now be slashed to the ground, demolished. Probably, later, this little critic will be ashamed, or embarrassed. The point is, there is always, in any culture where there are praised writers and artists, a sump or a well of hatred for them, and always people ready to do them down. Then, in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, the stage of demolishing the great was short, was mild indeed, compared to Britain, or the great exemplars like the Soviet Union. Certainly Gottfried and others exhorted us to admire only Mayakovsky and Gorky, only writers with a proletarian background, but the trouble was, they were talking to people who had been formed by literature, and not prepared to anathematize their spiritual parents.

A scene: we have been discussing proletarian literature. As we rise from our chairs drugged with rhetoric and cigarette smoke, it can be seen that Dorothy is smiling, and is about to address Gottfried in a way we all wait for. "As for me, I am going to get an early night, and I might just *possibly* take *War and Peace* to bed with me." Then, with a gentle but triumphant roll of her eyes, she departs.

I now rather admire the sleights of hand we used to admit writers to favour that we were instructed to despise. Lawrence? Well, he was a miner's son wasn't he? Eliot? He was describing the decadence of the bourgeoisie. Yeats? He was Irish, an oppressed people. Virginia Woolf? She was a woman. Orwell? At that time he was being insulted by the Party, because he had told the truth about Spain. The trouble was some of us admired him. How did we get around this? I forget. But don't bother, Political Correctness, the offspring of Marxist dialectics, illustrates the ways of thought.

A scene: half a dozen of us are sitting around a table writing letters asking for money on behalf of the various organizations we run. We are all elated, laughing, inflated by our sneers at the people we are begging from, our "respectable sponsors." Because it is a small town, and there were never enough philanthropists to go around, we are swapping our sponsors like playing cards. "You can have Councillor Smith for Medical Aid, if I can have MP Jones for Friends of." "Then I shall have Cabinet Minister Z." "Then I shall have Lawyer X." Most of them appeared on the letterheads of all the organizations. "We got a fiver out of him last time." "Then he can cough up another fiver. They are only doing it anyway to get their names on the letterheads." What had our "respectable sponsors" done to earn such contempt? They were successful, by definition. They were not young. Worst of all, they were not revolutionaries. People who believed in achieving socialism or even a just society by peaceful means were cowardly lackeys of the ruling class, at the very least.

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Fifteen or so years later, when my name is on a letterhead as a respectable sponsor, I am in an office where I overhear a young woman, the treasurer, saying to the secretary (now a professor of resplendent respectability), a young man dressed in the left-wing uniform of the time, tight jeans, an oversized sweater with a hole in the elbow, "It's time we got some more money out of our respectable sponsors." With the same sarcastic contempt.

Edward Upward, a British Communist, wrote a novel series that illustrates, like a little time capsule, not only his experiences, but ours – and a thousand other groups. The series title is *The Spiral Ascent*. In those days everyone still believed that we were living in a time when things could only get better. Humankind was bound for general prosperity and progress - if you were Red, then this by definition could only be achieved by the Communists. Volume One is *In the Thirties*. That is, when "everyone" was Communist, near-Communist, or was reacting violently against Communism. Volume Two is *The Rotten Elements*. The author's note says it aims "to give an historically accurate picture of the policies and attitudes in the British Communist Party during the late 1940s." You put the book down thinking you have been reading about the fate of nations, but it's a story of a tiny group of isolated people in a provincial town, whose every word, decision, action, is given the importance they would have in Moscow. Exactly: we are reading about the same psychological processes, the same group dynamics, that made and unmade the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Heroes and traitors, splits and heresies, martyrs and plots and intrigues – it's all the same. Volume Three, not published until 1977, is *No Home But the Struggle*. The titles alone are like a little potted report of socialist thinking of that time.

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KAREN WILKIN

Greenberg's Eye

Clement Greenberg died on May 7, 1994 at the age of eighty-five. Once widely acclaimed as the most significant art critic of our day, internationally recognized as the most articulate and perceptive champion of American postwar abstraction, he had become a sort of mythic bugbear in the last decade or so, invoked, like Freud, by his admirers as the ultimate authority and by his adversaries as the source of everything they disapproved of. He had written little and published less since the 1970s, yet he remained an exacting, often cantankerous presence in the consciousness of the art world; for some, an embodiment of notions of aesthetic excellence and integrity, and for others – even those who dismissed or disagreed with his views – someone to be reckoned with, a kind of perennial gadfly. In certain circles, public denunciation of Greenberg is still proof of independence of mind, assertion of the irrelevance of the art he admired and what he said about it, proof of seriousness. It's going to be interesting to see what will happen now that he will have to be judged not by legend and anecdote, but by the essays and criticism that originally established his reputation, much of the most important written for this magazine. There are thirty years' worth, a record of Greenberg's day-to-day testing of his eye and his judgment, and his efforts to find the common thread that ran through his varied experiences. These writings are now collected in four volumes, edited by John O'Brian, Professor of Art History at the University of British Columbia. The first two volumes of the series, *Perceptions and Judgments: 1939-1944* and *Arrogant Purpose: 1945-1949*, were published in 1986 by the University of Chicago Press; the last, *Affirmations and Refusals: 1950-1956* and *Modernism with a Vengeance: 1957-1969*, appeared last year.

They make up a definitive, annotated edition of the first published form of essays often better known in later, reworked versions. (The differences are frequently substantial, since Greenberg welcomed the opportunity to refine his tightly-packed articles and eliminate what he called the "haste and waste" of his self-education; the essays collected in *Art and Culture*, for example, turn out to be far less compressed in their original incarnations.) The four volumes are full of surprises, not the least being how much time and thought Greenberg devoted to disciplines other than

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visual art, particularly early on. There are probing essays about fiction and poetry, reviews of biographies and art historical works, ruminations on literary criticism and the state of culture. Interestingly, there is nothing on music or architecture – "too hard," Greenberg remarked, in the early 1980s. A 1945 piece on Anthony Tudor's ballet, *Dim Lustre,* is, I believe, unique; Greenberg admired the work – the piece protests the omission of *Dim Lustre* from two consecutive seasons of Ballet Theater – but curiously, the man whose name is synonymous with formal analysis seems wholly engrossed by the ballet's narrative and oblivious of its character as dance.

To read all four volumes is to watch a trenchant, widely-read observer educate himself in public, tracking his responses, measuring what he sees against what he has seen, generalizing from particular encounters, but staying close to his original experience. The prose is lean and workman-like; words are used with near-pedantic precision. (Greenberg cared intensely about accurate language; despite his rather old-fashioned code of good manners, he never hesitated to correct anyone's grammar or usage.) From the start, his critical voice is assured, so much so that his conclusions, his generalizations about how modernist art evolved, were often viewed as directives. Yet it's clear that each essay begins with a tacit "in my opinion" and that the critic, at his best, was led, however unwillingly, by his eye, never by preconception. In a 1969 interview, the last inclusion in the published works to date, he said:

> There are criteria, but they can't be put into words – any more than the difference between good and bad can be put into words. Works of art move you to a greater or lesser extent, that's all. So far, words have been futile in the matter. Nobody hands out prescriptions to art or artists. You just wait and see what happens – what the artist does.

Greenberg's deceptively simple methodology, of looking voraciously and then drawing general, albeit entirely subjective conclusions from particular, direct experience, was established early on. A 1948 review of a Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *Collage,* is typical. Embedded in an evaluation of the show – Greenberg concludes that Picasso and Braque are the medium's masters, "followed at a distance by Arp and Schwitters" and faults Gris for using collage in a way indistinguishable from paint – is a terse summary of the significance of Cubism:

> Cubism brought about the destruction of the illusionist means and effects that had characterized Western painting since the fifteenth cen-

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> tury. The fictive depths of the picture were drained, and its action was brought forward and identified with the immediate, physical surface of the canvas, board, or paper. By pasting a piece of newspaper lettering to the canvas one called attention to the physical reality of the work of art and made that reality the same as the art. The large newspaper type arrested the spectator's eye and prevented it from passing behind the physical surface of the picture into space created by illusion. Painting was no longer a matter of fictive projection or description, and the picture became one with the pigment, the texture, and the flat surface that constituted it as an object.

At the end is one of those observations Greenberg's detractors insisted were declarations of what pictures *ought* to be; the actual phrasing is worth noting and helps to explain the critic's frequent recourse to "I never said that" in public confrontations: "[The exhibition] *also would seem to show that the greatest success in collage so far* has been gained through compositions based on a preponderance of rectangular forms whose contours are kept roughly parallel to the edges of the canvas – in other words, repeat the canvas's shape." (Italics mine.) Description, not prescription. Not that Greenberg couldn't be dogmatic or scathing. Witness a 1948 description of a painting by Theodoros Stamos as "sickeningly sweet, inept, and utterly empty."

While a model for Greenberg's expository prose can be found in Samuel Johnson's robust language, and while there are parallels to be drawn between his critical approach and the penetrating criticism of T. S. Eliot, whom he admired and learned from, we must look to Immanuel Kant for the source of what Greenberg called his "home-made aesthetics." Experiencing art directly was only the beginning; the critic's task was to ". . . draw the conclusions from his vast experience of art and shape them into a coherent intellectual structure" – that is, "to approach art philosophically," which Greenberg defines as "to abstract from one's experience of it."

"Kant had bad taste," Greenberg notes, "and relatively meager experience of art, yet his capacity for abstraction enabled him, despite many *gaffes*, to establish in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* what is the most satisfactory basis for aesthetics we yet have." (It's characteristic of Greenberg to state this without recapitulating Kant's position.)

These passages come from a 1955 review of two books by Bernard Berenson, an essay less interesting for what it tells us about its nominal subject than for its insights into how Greenberg defined his own enterprise. (Such discoveries are part of the pleasure and extreme usefulness of O'Brian's collection, which is not to discount the worth of having well-known, frequently published articles set in the chronological context of

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less familiar ones.) The terms in which Greenberg praises his older colleague, for example, are revealing:

> Where I disagree I always find something *worth* disagreeing about; Mr. Berenson is never trivial or obtuse. And he invites one to take issue with him by the very ingenuousness with which he reveals the operations of his taste. This is the trait of the great critic, and Mr. Berenson is one of the greatest of them all. But he is a working critic, not a philosopher of art.

The distinction is an important one, for Greenberg. "Mr. Berenson's aptitude, as far as I can see, is more for intuitive induction than for conscious reasoning; it is precisely because he has more of an 'eye' and a sensibility than an intellect that he has been able to make himself 'that instrument of precision in the appreciation of works of art' which he indubitably is. Philosophical appreciation is a different matter." And here Berenson falls short:

> Kant asked how art in general worked. Mr. Berenson asks, more specifically, how the visual arts work and what makes the difference between good and bad in them; but the answers require almost as much abstraction. *His* answers, however, diminish rather than abstract from his experience, and his experience again and again escapes from his theories, as we see from the appreciative and penetrating comments he lets himself make on works of art that violate them.

Berenson's determination to judge all art according to the "canons derived from Greek art and from its tradition as continued in postmedieval European art" is pronounced "dogmatic, not philosophical." No matter what we conclude about the greatness of art in the past, Greenberg objects, it is impossible to establish "limiting or enabling rules for the achievement of greatness in the present or the future." You just wait and see what happens – what the artist does.

The four volumes of essays allow us to see what *Greenberg* does, as a "working critic" writing about exhibitions of artists ranging from masters like Delacroix and Picasso to newcomers – at the time – like David Smith and Jackson Pollock. Much of Greenberg's critical authority derives from his legendary prescience about the importance of the Abstract Expressionists, particularly his early advocacy of Smith and Pollock. (His detractors point to his equally legendary dismissal of others, notably the Pop artists, who now enjoy substantial reputations and reassuring sales records.)

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Writing about a 1943 – pre-pour – Pollock exhibition, Greenberg finds equivalents between the young painter's "muddiness of color" – not wholly a bad thing – and "that American chiaroscuro which dominated Melville, Hawthorne, Poe, and has best been translated into painting by Blakelock and Ryder." Greenberg has reservations. He's not entirely convinced by Pollock's "not so abstract abstractions," but he applauds his ambition and originality. He is wholehearted in his liking for certain pictures: ". . . *Conflict,* and *Wounded Animal,* with its chalky incrustation, are among the strongest abstract paintings I have yet seen by an American." Earlier the same year, Greenberg was equally unstinting in his praise for Smith's sculpture, *Interior,* ". . . a sort of horizontal cage figuring the skeleton of the organism which is the family, and whose corporeal identity is the house. . . . However, the work does not stand on its symbolism but on its formal energy, for which the symbolism is only a springboard. . . . Smith is thirty-six. If he is able to maintain the level set in the work he has already done – of which other fine examples may be seen in the back room of the Willard Gallery – he has a chance of becoming one of the greatest of all American artists."

Gradually, Greenberg abandoned even the pared-down descriptions of these early articles, preferring to "draw the conclusions from his vast experience of art and shape them into a coherent intellectual structure." His eye told him that the works he found to be superior shared certain characteristics, attributes that he deemed particular to the course of modernism. This he saw as a process of radical self-criticism, of each discipline's gradual jettisoning of whatever was not intrinsic to its medium. In painting, this included overt narrative and the illusion of enterable spaces or three-dimensional forms; modernist sculpture, Greenberg observed, "lagged behind" modernist painting, probably because it had fewer conventions that it could discard, being intrinsically three-dimensional and spatially complex, but it slowly found its direction by following the lead of painting, via Cubist collage and construction. Eventually, modernist painting and sculpture, in their most rarefied forms, were no longer about the depiction of anything else, but instead were chiefly about their own irreducible physical properties and the history of their own making – essentially abstract. This did not mean that modernist art was empty or arbitrary. The best work of this kind addressed the whole being, emotions and intellect alike, without words, through the eye, just as music does, through the ear.

The work Greenberg responded to most strongly, including that of his contemporaries, Abstract Expressionists such as Smith and Pollock, and later, that of a younger group of abstract color painters and sculptors – Frankenthaler, Louis, Noland, Olitski, and Caro, among others – shared

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these characteristics. The art he liked least, Surrealism, Pop, Conceptual art – anything that put literary content or ideas ahead of formal considerations – did not. But it was the art that led the way. Greenberg's "homemade aesthetics" were formulated to account for the phenomenology of the art he found most compelling; the art was not made in response to his formulations.

There's a strong element of Marxist dialectic in Greenberg's view of "the way art works," not surprising in someone of his background and generation. Like most intelligent New Yorkers who lived through the Depression, he was attracted to Marxism and repulsed by Stalinism – which is to say, like many intelligent New Yorkers, he was a Trotskyist – but by the late 1940s he claimed to be a "disabused Marxist." Anticommunist but liberal during the 1950s, he could sound downright reactionary in his last two decades, although it was sometimes difficult to tell how much of it was pure contrariness. Generally speaking, Greenberg was scrupulous in his separation of art and politics; goodness and badness in art, he believed, had nothing to do with political or social content. Yet Marxist attitudes inform his earliest writings, perhaps most notably in the seminal "Avant-garde and Kitsch," 1939, in which he ponders the vagaries of taste within the polarities of high and popular culture. He returned to the theme in "The Plight of Our Culture," 1953, an exploration of the fate of high art in a society formed by a new combination of capitalism, democracy, and a rising postwar "middlebrow" culture. He finds nothing reassuring in this situation, since unlike the essentially peasant culture posited in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," which declared its difference from high culture by its consistent admiration for the slick and the *ersatz,* modern middlebrow culture embraces both good and bad, apparently without making the kind of critical distinctions that Greenberg deemed imperative. (In his introduction to Volume Three, O'Brian reads "The Plight of Our Culture" as a reversal of Greenberg's earlier views, a capitulation to right-wing pieties and middle-class values, an interpretation that seems unsupported by the text.) Greenberg rarely shifted his attention as unequivocally from art to the society that produced the art as he did in his early essays, but he was absorbed by questions of taste for the rest of his life.

A 1940 essay, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," is one of the earliest discussions of another recurring theme: the gradual, perhaps historically inevitable, separation of high art – painting and sculpture, that is – from explicit literary content and illusionism. The title, which refers to a celebrated eighteenth-century text, signals Greenberg's desire to join the great tradition of aesthetic discourse. The essay is an examination of the meaning and nature of abstraction, a line of inquiry expanded and deepened in

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later, better-known essays of the 1950s, such as "American Type Painting," "Modernist Painting," "The Case for Abstract Art," and many more. The earlier article is about as theoretical as Greenberg gets, while the later ones, in spite of their author's remarkable ability to "abstract from his vast experience of art," remain tied to the work of the artists with whom he was most closely identified, the painters and sculptors whose work he championed, whose efforts could be seen as paradigmatic of what he valued most highly in art.

O'Brian has provided substantial introductions to Volumes One and Three of the series, and the differences between them could be the subject of an article dealing with the nuances of survival in academia in the 1980s and 1990s. The introduction to Volume One is a neutral overview, a thoughtful and intelligent discussion of relevant issues that set Greenberg's work in context. The introduction to Volume Three could be read as a kind of public handwashing, the editor's apparent effort to distance himself from his increasingly controversial subject. O'Brian's odd take on "The Plight of Our Culture," for example, seems to have more to do with "official" attitudes in the present-day academic world than with Greenberg's article.

Still, we must be grateful to O'Brian not only for his exemplary editing but also for having produced the collection in the first place. He has done anyone who cares about art or criticism an invaluable service. He has even provided some revelations, no matter how well known Greenberg's enthusiasms and antipathies are by now, to anyone who has paid attention to serious writing about art. Greenberg's pleasure in Matisse, like his admiration for Pollock or for Picasso when he was a Cubist, come as no surprise, nor does his distaste for any art dependent upon message or ideology at the expense of form. But it is always enlightening to read what he has to say, both in support and in dismissal. His comments on Henry Moore, in a 1947 exhibition review, were probably not very gratifying to the artist's advocates, but from today's vantage point, they serve as a pithy observation about modern-day taste. Of Moore's then latest works – reclining figures, family groups, and a helmet-like head – Greenberg writes:

> But even at its best this work is not so original as it intends itself to be. It answers too perfectly to the current notion of how modern sophisticated and inventive sculpture should look, without at the same time disappointing the popular demand for the heroic. (Truly original modern sculpture like Brancusi's makes that demand seem irrelevant.)

And who would have thought that Greenberg would write with real

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feeling about Paleolithic cave painting? Of course, he often stated his preference for high-quality illusionistic art over anything else. (He liked to confound hostile audiences by saying that if he had his way, the best art of his time would have been figurative, but unfortunately, that's not how things turned out.) The brief essay provides a vivid characterization of the essential qualities of Paleolithic painting:

> The evidence would show that the prehistoric painter did not try consciously to make any such thing as a "beautiful" image, but only to get a realistic one down on rock. Yet, as we see, he stopped short of a realism too literal and complete to be satisfactory as mural art, and aimed at something more vivid than mere precision, more instantaneous and lifelike than any painstaking cataloguing of visual facts. And he captured the characteristic movements, the intense mass and the springiness of living muscle, fat, and hide as well as any artist has since.

Similar acute observations about "how art works" are to be found throughout Greenberg's criticism, buried in pieces with unpromising titles or apparently familar subjects, like nuggets to be extracted by a close reading of his dense, meaty articles. Arresting comments on the development of traditional painting, for example, are found in a 1952 essay entitled "The Cross-Breeding of Modern Sculpture": "Only by the end of the fifteenth century does painting free itself from bas-relief – as sculpture before it had freed itself from architecture – and really rival sculpture in naturalism. When its color begins to breathe and its edges to dissolve, then painting becomes altogether itself (although, as I cannot insist enough, this does not necessarily mean that it becomes better as art.)" It's not exactly a throwaway idea, but it is tossed off lightly, en route to a discussion of Michelangelo's sculpture.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Greenberg dropped tantalizing hints about a work in progress, dealing with old master art and the most evolved formulations of his "home-made aesthetics." After a while, you learned not to ask about it. Up until a few years ago, too, there were occasional lectures and even more occasional publications in periodicals, although privately, Greenberg might observe, "I've said everything I had to say." There's word of an additional volume of *The Collected Essays and Criticism* still to come. Let's hope it materializes soon. Maybe there will be real surprises. The cumulative effect of O'Brian's four volumes is not only to reaffirm Greenberg's claims to preeminence for his acute eye and formidable intellect, but to make you intensely curious about that work in progress, since many of the most arresting of his comments are provoked not by the modern-day, often abstract art with which he was most usually

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associated, but by the art of the past. (He remained, however, in touch with innumerable young painters and sculptors.)

Almost to the last, Greenberg retained an apparently insatiable appetite for looking at art. He seemed invigorated by going to museums and galleries, rejuvenated by studio visits. Less than five years ago, he was still willing – even eager – to travel across the country to see new work, devoting equal energy to young unknowns and acknowledged masters. He wore out companions half his age on these visits, happy to have more and more works brought out for his judgment when everyone else longed to call it a day. As with almost anything connected with Greenberg, there's much misinformation about his behavior in the studio, most commonly a charge, often leveled by those who weren't there, that he told artists what to do. In fact, he told them what he thought. The critic's function, Greenberg believed, following Kant, was to make value judgments, wholly subjective and unwilled. He stated what he liked and what he didn't, and left it at that, without qualifications or explanations. "You can't predict art and you can't second-guess yourself," he'd say. But he could also say, "I was wrong about that. You were ahead of me," when he found he responded at a later viewing to something he had disliked the first time.

Greenberg's studio practice may remain little known – there's work to be done here – but it was a crucial aspect of his activity as a critic. He was not a detached, "impartial" observer, but a partisan insider, close to the artists with whom he was most often associated. (He painted not badly himself, albeit for himself.) Artists valued his company and his eye. "He was the most interesting man I'd ever met," the sculptor, Anthony Caro, said recently. Greenberg's eye was honed as much by his exposure to the work of the painters and sculptors who were his friends as by looking at older art; his expectations were affected by their innovations, his ideas about art influenced by their studio talk. He was frank, for example, about his debt to Hans Hofmann's notions of the importance of formal structure. This deep engagement with the hands-on realities of making art – as opposed to theory – is part of what makes Greenberg's best writing so immediate and so illuminating.

A 1950 essay nominally about Venetian painting touches on the differences between Florentine and Venetian art, between the Renaissance and the Baroque, and even wrestles with the essential character of painting itself. Greenberg's implicit distinction owes something to Wölfflin's classic opposition of the linear and the painterly, but it is tied closely to the physical act of manipulating a specific material with a specific instrument, to the real difference between the character and possibilities of tempera versus those of oil paint:

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> Oil on canvas suggests "open" rather than "closed" forms, loose rather than tight contours, broken rather than smooth, uniform colors, transparent and vibrating rather than opaque surfaces. Oil fulfils itself on canvas when the painter invents form with a full brush, with color and in masses, instead of tinting or filling in a prepared outline. Then the painter invents form with his brush, not his pencil, and sees everything in terms of transition rather than sharp separation.

Greenberg outlines the course of painterliness from the seventeenth century's bravura paint handling to modernism's initial assertion that "it is possible to *draw* color and draw *with* color, and that all painting can be brush drawing." But that soon changed; "Matisse turned the procedure inside out by designing in flat areas with hardly any drawing, using his brush like a broom. Mondrian made the final conclusion . . . and in a sense arrived back where the Renaissance began." Did Greenberg see Pollock's shimmering, all-over webs of paint as a twentieth-century revival of a kind of painterly painting? Difficult to say. He concludes the essay by observing that ". . . the process that ends with Mondrian begins with Velázquez. The dialectical principle by which all things are inevitably converted into their opposites may not operate in nature, but it certainly seems to do so in art."

The same 1950 essay contains one of Greenberg's most revealing passages, uncharacteristically personal. It makes explicit both the passion that informs his whole career as a critic and his willingness to follow, above all, what his eye told him. He describes a picture that seems to him a touchstone of excellence, a "tawny little jewel," seen at a recent show of old masters at Knoedler Galleries. "I am told," he writes, "this particular Titian has an incomplete pedigree but, if Titian did not paint it, whoever did was a contemporary of his and, for at least that moment, as great as he. It is a picture I could dance in front of."

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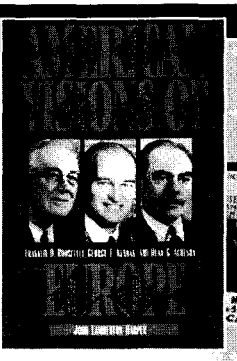

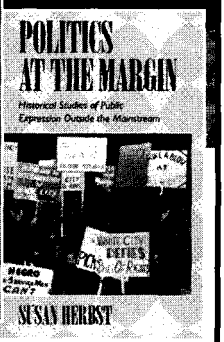

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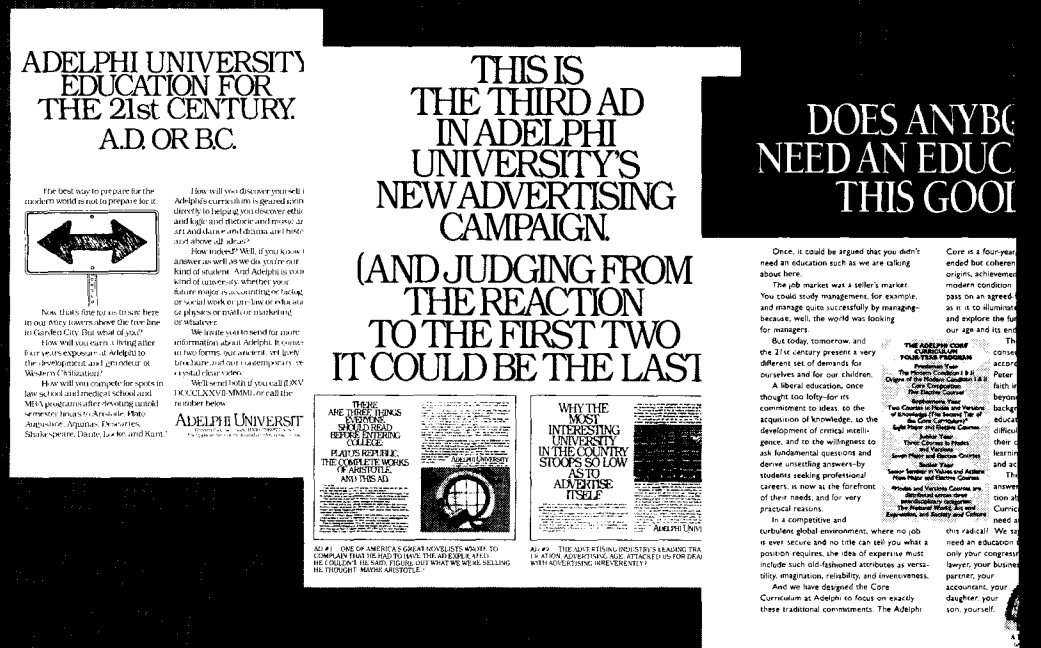
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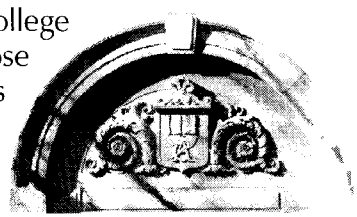

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DAVID BARBOZA

An Interview with David Riesman

DB: One of the most significant of your many contributions, I think, has been your commentary on the antinomian character of the 1960s. You have suggested that the countercultural pressures of that era seem to be part of the reason why America is suffering now from an extended bout of cultural relativism. If I have read you correctly, you have recently argued that since the publication in 1950 of your book *The Lonely Crowd,* the pendulum has swung too far. Bland conformity has given way to an arrogant individualism, characterized by a victim mentality and by political correctness. You suggest that, in a sense, in American society the "lonely crowd" has given way to the "angry mob."

Of course, *The Lonely Crowd* is one of your most famous books. Let's begin with how you came to write it. Didn't Erich Fromm, who I believe also influenced you in your personal life, have something to do with it?

DR: Well, I hadn't had any previous contact with social psychology. And Fromm had an influence on my book because he presented a version of psychoanalytic social psychology that was not Freudian but was best illustrated in a book he wrote with Michael Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village*. Fromm had also written a book with Ernest Schachtel, who later taught at the New School. They had done a study in the twenties on the German working class in which they discovered among people who were nominally socialist a potential for an authoritarian, and therefore fascist, affiliation. Fromm was a dissident member of what's now called the Frankfurt School. I really gained the idea of social character from him.

The first year that I was at Yale working on what became *The Lonely Crowd,* the Yale anthropology department put on an interesting experiment. I attended a seminar at which two Yale anthropologists were presenting material about the island of Truk and trying to determine whether Fromm could say something about the social character of the Trukese. They were very skeptical about whether he could. Ralph Linton chaired

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Editor's Note: This interview took place in Winchester, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1993.

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this seminar, and I remember one episode which illustrates Fromm's approach. Fromm asked, "Are the children ever teased?"

And George Murdoch's first response was, "Oh no. Oh no. The children are treated very nicely."

"Are you sure that they're never teased? Can you not think of any episode of teasing?" Fromm persisted.

"Oh yes," one of the anthropologists said. "A child would be given a piece of bread and an uncle would say, 'Just let me have a look at that.' He'd take a bite. Another relative would say, 'Let me have a look at it.' By the time they were all done taking a look at it, the piece of bread had disappeared."

That observation was central to Fromm's picture of the Trukese, which was radically different from what was presented at the seminar: all these terribly nice people in this Pacific paradise who were very good at tying knots and doing other nautical things. Fromm's indication of what he thought about Trukese social character was confirmed by historical evidence gathered from earlier missionary accounts, which the anthropologists in their snobbery had rejected. There was high dramatic tension. The Yale anthropologists had thought that they could deceive Fromm; that he would not get the right picture.

DB: What in Fromm's work did you find most attractive?

DR: I don't remember when Fromm's book *Man for Himself* came out, but I didn't think Fromm was a very good writer. His thought was better than his writing, and my "analysis" with him was really conversational – not that he didn't help me psychologically; he did. I must tell you of my first encounter with him, how it came about that I went to see him at all. My mother, a very avant-garde person, had been interested in psychoanalysis for a very long time. She went to New York to be analyzed by Karen Horney, and afterwards she wanted to discuss her interest with me. I met Karen Horney, who told my mother that I was a "very resigned young man," which was the case. And Horney, who then was very close to Fromm (they later split), suggested that I go to him. I went to his home and office on the Upper West Side near Columbia University. When I saw the *Gesammelte Werke* of Marx and Engels on his bookshelves, I said to Fromm, "I don't want any of that stuff."

Fromm said, "Don't worry. I'm not out to persuade you or convince you." I later became skeptical of Fromm's picture of the lower middle class, a kind of snobbish, European style picture, just as I later did with C. Wright Mills's picture of Americans in his book, *White Collar*. But I did accept Fromm's focus on social psychology.

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DB: Is it true that one factor in leading you to write about the American social character was the research you had undertaken in the late 1940s, which led to your essay, "The Ethics of We Happy Few"?

DR: There's so much chance and haphazard in the way *The Lonely Crowd* began. I had become interested in public opinion research through my other great mentor, Carl Joachim Friedrich, when I was a Harvard student. And he had brought to Harvard from the BBC a man named Charles Siepmann, who had initiated some public opinion surveys in the UK. Friedrich also alerted me to what's been my habit ever since: whenever I open a newspaper I look first at the letters column. With Nathan Glazer, whom I had not met but whose work I'd read, I started looking at interviews in New York City in the Eastern office of the National Opinion Research Center with, as I now realize, a kind of characterological slant. My curiosity was, "Why are there so few 'don't knows'?" Ten percent or less of the people being asked questions in a national survey respond, "Don't know." What does this say about Americans? (And now, as a footnote, if one listens to C-SPAN or National Public Radio call-in shows, again one has the sense of the arrogance of Americans, that they know – we know – how to fix everything. We know that all politicians are corrupt, and so on.)

Looking at those interviews, we then proceeded to do our own interviews with students at a boarding school near New Haven. We sat down and looked at them. And then we hit on what we first called "conscience-direction" versus "other-direction."

DB: Was "conscience-direction" the forerunner of the term "inner-direction"?

DR: Yes.

DB: Did this research evolve into your essay, "The Ethics of We Happy Few"?

DR: I think that question can be answered this way: I recently happened on David Halberstam's book, *The Best and the Brightest*. In it he quotes me on something I'd completely forgotten: my asking these Washington people who came from Harvard and were talking about counter-terrorist work they were planning in Vietnam, "Have you ever been to Utah?"

They said, "No. Have you?"

And I said, "No."

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My point was that America was a very belligerent country – as the Civil War suggested – and it wasn't a very good idea to get Americans aroused in foreign combat because who knew what would happen then within the country. And then I talked about the Civil War. I think what drives me is, as this example illustrates, several things: one, a wide-angled curiosity about this country. And two, a certain skepticism. Not cynicism but skepticism.

When my wife Evey and I had a chance to go to Buffalo for my first teaching job, my friends at Harvard Law School tried to discourage me. They said, "Oh you'll be lost there. Maybe we can find something for you here."

But we were just delighted with the thought of Buffalo. It was a working-class city, unlike more middle-class Rochester. And we had lived our lives primarily on the Atlantic seaboard, from Washington to Mt. Desert Island in Maine. Buffalo was the "far west." So we tried there to meet all sorts of people. Buffalo didn't have much of an upper class, and we were immediately welcomed. It was in Buffalo that I met the future co-author of *The Lonely Crowd,* Reuel Denney, who was a high school teacher. But I can't emphasize enough that *The Lonely Crowd* was not about all of America, just a segment of it, primarily what I have now come to call "bi-coastal America," which is, by the way, the America that is represented in the supposed diversity of the Clinton Administration. Very few people from the Midwest and very few ethnic whites, other than Jews.

DB: In light of the fact that you were conducting your research for *The Lonely Crowd* shortly after the Second World War, were you concerned at all, perhaps in part because of the rise of European fascism and the Nazi propaganda machine, that there was a growing trend toward "mass culture" which might threaten to glue people together into a mindless conformity?

DR: I don't think so, but I think Fromm had that view, too strongly, too snobbishly. I resisted looking down on Americans. The Europeans had a view of the lower middle class which was entirely contemptuous. I was put off by that. I didn't like it.

DB: In *The Lonely Crowd* you wrote that the socialization process, or the molding process, had shifted, in large part, from parents to peers and the media, thereby creating the "other-directed" individual. What do you consider the dominant socializers of people coming of age in the nineties? Has it continued along that "other-directed" stream?

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DR: Even more powerfully. Parents – or usually now "a parent," since a large proportion of children are not growing up with both of their actual parents – and their children are much more vulnerable to the peer culture. But I really should say "peer cultures" because contrary to the vision of *The Lonely Crowd,* I see now something which is, in some respects, less attractive than the "other-directeds." The "other-directed" person was receptive to a large constituency of others. What I see now is a group of people connected, not always by physical presence, but by network, who despise the "others," and who see themselves not as massified but as something else. The example I sometimes use is the movies today, where we have not one movie being shown in a huge theater for everybody, but instead different movies in small theaters for half a dozen different, segmented groups. A certain clannishness or zip code or area code America. People who think of themselves as independent thinkers because they're not those "others."

DB: When *The Lonely Crowd* was published you were ambivalent about the value of the social character you identified as "other-directed." However, in other articles you published, you made a clearly negative judgment, seeing "other-direction" as a barrier or threat to free expression and independent thought. Is that correct?

DR: Yes, I think that's right.

DB: Was the trend toward "other-direction," in part, the result of a renewed egalitarian spirit and the breakdown of traditional authority, both of which were perhaps transformed by the technological sophistication of the modern world?

DR: Well, that's a very good question. The Second World War uprooted people. It sent millions to the university; moved women out of the home to work, and then, of course, sent them back when the men returned. But the war, for those who took part in it of course, dramatically reshaped their milieu. It shook up America like a salt cellar and then deposited its contents variously about the country. It renewed the egalitarian spirit. One of the astonishing things about the war was the near unanimity of support it had. Before the war, I had been very alert to the isolationists and had actually written an article, "What's Wrong with the Interventionists?" for *Common Sense,* a journal edited by Selden Rodman, who was one of the isolationists more characteristic of Yale than of Harvard. Some isolationists feared that if America went to war it would

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become fascist. And my attitude was that America was too unruly for *that* to happen. I resisted theories about the authoritarian personality and thought it was a misreading of the antinomian American even before the war, but my attitude was strengthened by the war.

DB: Does America's peculiar brand of anti-elitist, anti-intellectual and anti-authoritarian character – or tendency – bear any relation to the development of cultural conformity in this country?

DR: In the book, *Education and Politics at Harvard,* I described two kinds of meritocracy. One I called "aristocratic meritocracy," and I attributed that to Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell, who looked forward to training the leaders of America but did not expect them all to come from the patrician class. Yet he and his sort of people would judge who was fit to be trained. And I compared that with what then (at the time of the book's publication) prevailed, which was "democratic meritocracy," in which any number could play and there were formal tests of merit. "Democratic meritocracy" came after the war.

DB: Is there a trade-off between egalitarianism and freedom – or liberty? You write a little about that in your work. Often, it seems, the movement toward egalitarianism makes for a desire among people to want fewer distinctions.

DR: Yes. I illustrate that in the book about Harvard by describing a proposal in connection with the first freshman dormitory that had been built there in decades. The dormitory was to have its own program for the student residents, which would be very demanding, intellectually outward bound. And students would have to know that it was very tough and serious. But some objected on the ground that it was elitist. I noted in my discussion that these objections, among people who actually were *all* part of an elite by virtue of the fact that they were Harvard students, were preposterous. I got nowhere. This anti-elitist bent was powerful. And of course, if anything, it is even more powerful today in terms of victim groups and excluded groups.

DB: Do you contend that you can have both egalitarianism and liberty?

DR: Yes, but there is a trade-off. If egalitarianism is pushed too far you lose liberty. You lose everything in the things you can't do. I have had an interest for some time in boarding schools for black boys. Some in the women's movements resist giving advantages of any sort to certain groups

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of boys, regardless of the needs such boys might have. Their response is, "You can't do such a thing because it would privilege boys." If I were to argue, as I have, that boys who attend such single-sex schools might be more inclined to do literary things, to do aesthetic things that they wouldn't do in a co-ed setting, the response of some women's groups would be, "Boys are already too privileged. Too bad for them."

DB: One of the conflicts that comes up in some of these discussions is diversity. How does one maintain cultural integrity and yet remain open to diversity? How does one balance the two? How does one determine what brands of diversity contribute to a community, and what kinds detract from it? As we know, in the 1960s all sorts of things were done in the name of diversity. How does an individual, or a culture or a nation, determine which brands of diversity are legitimate and which are threats to our cultural integrity?

DR: Much that was valuable was destroyed in the 1960s – or largely destroyed. I think my pre-sixties work would have to be qualified by post-sixties caveats about extravagant individualism and its hazards – the triumph of "You're not the boss of me." And so, the answer I've come to is that what we have to preserve is diversity among institutions and pay less attention to diversity within them. We have developed what might be called the "diversity industry," which is the homogeneity of insisting on diversity, a standardized diversity which has been homogenized because everyone must have it. Institutions ought to be free to be non-heterogeneous. I was aware of the diversity industry with respect to blacks very early. When I was at the University of Chicago, I suspected that there were "slave traders" who were coming from Southern black colleges to the North and saying, "Do you want a few Negroes?" as they would then have said. "I'll find a few for you." I imagined a finder's fee. And now this is in full flower in the name of diversity programs in industry, and we have affirmative action officers in universities.

DB: So you support a diversity of institutions but within those institutions, you believe, there should be less diversity?

DR: There should be idiosyncrasy – the privilege of idiosyncrasy.

DB: That raises another question: is there a point where diversity begins to violate – maybe not violate but undermine – the traditional culture? Do too many pressures for value neutrality invite social and ethical relativism?

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DR: Yes. I share the fear very much.

DB: So with institutions you're a proponent of diversity, as with regions, but what about ways of life? In much of your writing I understand you to be saying that it is preferable to have as much diversity as possible, that uniformity or the homogenization of a culture may threaten free expression, creativity or independent thought.

DR: Right, but we are now at a point where one has to reconsider, because of what's resulting from "diversity." There has to be some sort of balance – some sort of limit on the anarchic temptations that are always present here in America. There are people opting out. We shouldn't allow people to opt out on responsibilities.

DB: Does the mass culture, as Ortega y Gasset once said, crush "everything that is different, everything that is excellent?"

DR: Yes. That's happening. We see it in the decline of American test scores. We see it in the recruitment of non-Americans for the more difficult engineering and science tasks.

DB: So much of your early work was centered on mass conformity and the need to encourage people to be more autonomous. But the need to assert one's self has apparently backfired. In the 1960s, perhaps, some came away with the wrong message.

DR: Yes indeed.

DB: Some believed one way to break out of this mass society was to undermine all reservoirs of authority.

DR: Well, as you can see, I'm not totally happy with the continuing influence of *The Lonely Crowd* in this respect.

DB: Much of your work has been underlined by the themes of individualism and cultural conformity, and the theory that students ought to be challenged to "lean against the wind." In your autobiographical essay, "Becoming an Academic Man," I found stirrings of this individualistic bent. Can you recall anything from your childhood that relates to these themes?

DR: Thinking about noncomformity, it was hard to be a noncomformist

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vis-à-vis my mother. She looked down on people who did the ordinary work of the world. Since her standards were so high and I couldn't come close to meeting them, it took Carl Friedrich and later Erich Fromm to help me overcome my sense of inadequacy. And both of them had this ability because they both came from Heidelberg. So if these people of cultivation, greater even than that of my parents, respected me, that made an enormous difference to me.

DB: In your autobiographical essay you wrote about your mother's conception of being "first-rate."

DR: That's right. The term "first-rate" was constantly raised by my mother in our home. I became very allergic to it, yet I was very obedient to the judgments of my parents. I majored in biochemistry at Harvard because my parents said, "What's the point of studying a subject depending on books? You can always read books but you won't always have laboratories." Yet there were certain episodes in which, though I didn't recognize it at the time, I was departing from the parental script.

DB: So there was in your family life, in a way, an orthodoxy – a pressure to conform and to achieve?

DR: My parents took it for granted and did not consider it an achievement for me to graduate at the top of my class, because there was nothing original about that. My mother was unorthodox; anti-orthodox; it meant nothing to her that she had graduated at the top of her own Bryn Mawr class, and it did not matter to her that my father was known beyond the borders of this country for his work in medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. None of us were by her definition and in her frequent term "first-rate." I would have had to compose a sonata, paint like a latter-day Picasso, or write like either George Eliot or T. S. Eliot to win approbation from my mother. This is not "pressure to conform and to achieve." Mere worldly success was not something my ascetic parents cared about. My mother was interested only in "first-raters," truly creative people, mostly artists, but Einstein would fall within the galaxy. She saw people like ourselves as merely doing the work of the world. During the First World War she joined, in a small way, a group of mothers who were sewing or doing other war-assisting things, but that wasn't characteristic of her. She was feminist before there were many feminists. Her closest identification was with her alma mater, Bryn Mawr College.

DB: You once told me that you had a secret stash of detective books you

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kept from your parents.

DR: Yes, I had to put them under the bed.

DB: I suppose your mother expected you to be reading Dante.

DR: Yes, exactly. In the original.

DB: What were you reading?

DR: Well, detective magazines, not even detective books; magazines which I couldn't wait for the drugstore to have. I would go out to the drugstore and buy the detective magazines and have an ice cream soda or a banana split. None of that fit with the Francophile cuisine at home.

DB: You rebelled in a very small way.

DR: I wasn't as aware as I am telling you now how rebellious I quietly was – occasionally was. I was the older son. My brother was much more disobedient. My mother would sometimes tell me, "Go see what your brother John's doing and tell him to stop."

DB: Did your father also have these ideas of being "first-rate"?

DR: My father had much more conventional ideas. He was very obedient to the dictates of his own world in not accepting my mother's verdict on his professional work. He was a distinguished professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, and he had a private medical practice as well. He was much older: he was forty-two when my mother was twenty-six. My mother had won the European fellowship from Bryn Mawr, which was intended to create an academic career for her – to begin one. But she shied away from that. She spent some time meeting the people around *The New Republic* in New York.

DB: Did things change after you went to Harvard? Wasn't your mother proud of the fact that you had graduated from Harvard with honors and then received a degree from Harvard Law School – that you were a clerk for Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis?

DR: No. No, to her, I was doing the ordinary work of the world. I was not one of those "creative" people.

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DB: About Fromm. You said earlier that your mother introduced you to him.

DR: My mother did. What she said was, "I want to be able to talk to you about psychoanalysis. So I'd like you to be in the same analytic frame as I am. And my analyst, Karen Horney, recommended Erich Fromm." That's how I went to him. I was in Buffalo at that time. I'd go into New York City on a weekend and have two hours on a Saturday and two hours on a Sunday. Here you might find some of the seeds of individualism. My law school colleagues at Buffalo, such as Mark DeWolfe Howe (a distinguished scholar of legal history and author of a major work on Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.), were very scornful of psychoanalysis. Fromm pointed out how childish it was of me to take so seriously the views of someone as provincial as Mark DeWolf Howe.

DB: In the end, the analytic experience served you well. Did you eventually talk with your mother about it?

DR: Oh I'm tremendously thankful for the experience. But I didn't talk to my mother about it as much as she would have liked. I wasn't inclined to share confidences with my mother or to identify with her as much as she would have expected me to. The picture that emerges here is not a happy one. It should be added, though, that in the last years of her life, for many many years, she suffered from Parkinson's disease, and she bore up bravely and stoicly, going in a wheelchair to concerts and continuing her intellectual life. Her analysis with Karen Horney continued. So this should help create a picture of sadness. The harsh comments that I've made about her should be qualified by my recognition of the bravery with which she endured a totally incurable disease.

DB: Did you grow closer to her in her latter years?

DR: I regret that I did not. I was away. I was not as good a caretaker as I wish I had been.

DB: Does your German-Jewish heritage have anything to do with your interest in cultural conformity, which is a question that is at the heart of Jewish culture?

DR: That is the contemporary struggle for identity. Of course, I'm completely a blank because I wasn't brought up a Jew. My mother's closest friend was Mary Frazier, after whom my sister was named. My parents were in the Social Register. The principal way in which being Jewish was

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brought home to me was my mother saying, "We German-Jews have lost whatever creativity we had at an earlier time." The Eastern European Jews were the successful ones who were taking over the businesses that had once been founded by the German-Jews.

On my mother's side, I remember my great-grandmother living on Spring Garden Street until 1929 with a horse and carriage. She had ten children; survived her husband by sixty-five years, and lived to be one hundred and four. Her family had had silk mills. But my mother still said, "The Russian-Jews," as she called the great majority of Jews, "have the energy we've lost. We're pallid. We're run out." Her models – foci – were Christian. She brought Shirley Watkins, a young novelist, to give Bible lessons to my brother and sister and me. We sang Christmas carols; we celebrated Christmas. We had Easter eggs.

You know, Friedrich, who was from Germany, did something very important for me. He pointed out to me that I was anti-Semitic. And he was right. A non-Jewish German who had thrown his full weight against the Nazis would of course be alert to that. He noticed that in my senior year, which is when I met him at Harvard, I had no Jewish associates. The "girls," like my future wife Evelyn, who went to the dances I attended, the debutante parties and so on, weren't Jewish. Friedrich could see I wasn't associating with any of the Jewish students. There were Jews in my class; they were pre-meds; they were studious. And I didn't know any of them. In a way, here again I was sharing the parental attitude I described so dramatically as an adult.

DB: So eventually with the help of Friedrich and Fromm you became more aware of what was going on, and also stood your ground: "I'm not going to hang onto any orthodoxy." Even coming out against the ROTC at Harvard, I suppose, was another example.

DR: Well, not that – after all I went to a Friends school and I'd gone to Friends Meetings weekly for six years. So if you ask about my religion, I'd say, I accepted the pacifist outlook; I was a pacifist. Not only did I protest the ROTC, but I protested the decorations at Widener Library of only the Americans in the First World War. Very early I had become critical of the First World War and our entry into it. One of the themes that runs through my thinking – I've illustrated it about the Civil War already – is sometimes called counter-cyclical, counter-factual. I was thinking of how if Woodrow Wilson had not been prepared to enter the First World War, he could have brokered a peace between Germany and France in 1917. The French were worn out, they were having mutinies; the German Social Democrats were voting against war credits. And we would've had neither Nazism nor Stalinism. . . .

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DB: What do you mean by the counter-cyclical or counter-factual?

DR: Counter-factual: imagining what the world would have been like had the United States not entered the First World War, but sought to broker a peace between Germany and France. And what Wilson was like – a Southerner and therefore pro-British, a polished Southerner, with the country vulnerable to anti-German propaganda, which is astonishing for you to think about today. It was much stronger against the "Huns" in the First World War than against the Nazis in the Second. Some states forbade the teaching of German. In general, I did not go for conformity, but I also disliked attitudes of contempt.

DB: Some would suggest that this nation is moving rapidly toward a kind of "mass conformity." Do you see that?

DR: My own attitude really has been critical of that view. It was Erich Fromm's view. "*Kleinbürger* to the lower middle class." Deprecating. It was until recently Christopher Lasch's view – the common view. But it was never my view. I shouldn't say "never." It was not, in the years we're talking about, my outlook. And I've indicated it to the extent that the people who read *The Lonely Crowd* said, "I'm other-directed and therefore benighted." For example, C. Wright Mills had this contempt to a high degree. In his book, *White Collar,* there's a picture of conformist white collar people and their occupations. I read the interviews on which the book is based. One of these interviews was with an Italian life insurance salesman. And from it, Mills gives a picture of the "bleached white-collar worker." My sense was a totally different reading of that interview. The salesman was doing something valuable for his clients, providing them with life insurance. He loved his company. He was full of gregarious energy. And to see him and others simply disparaged as "white collar" was wrong. I was alert to that quite early.

DB: Do you think the idea of mass conformity – it doesn't have to necessarily mean the lower class – the idea of the other-directed, applies to, say, the Clinton administration?

DR: Yes.

DB: The Clinton administration seems very aware of not wanting to alienate either side – or any side for that matter. And I see it that way and not as contempt for anything that's lower.

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DR: That puts it well. Yes. And at the same time there is something not wholly negative in that wish to please and to relate.

DB: Does cultural conformity carry over into our consumer culture?

DR: I'm glad you brought this up because on that score I'm quizzical. I don't have this panic about consumerism in that respect. I still see vast differences within our culture, and I think it would be very interesting to study differing attitudes in different countries, in different regions, and in different social strata. And I very much dislike the snobbery by which we look down on these consumer goods that we affluent and educated people have already worked our way beyond.

DB: So you don't see the mass consumer culture as threatening the nation's diversity of offerings?

DR: No, I don't see it as a threat. I see snobbery in the attitude that sees it as a threat, although I may be wrong. I see it is dismaying to people who miss the idiosyncracies.

DB: Related to our discussions of diversity and tolerance is the question of "multiculturalism." How do you see this debate?

DR: One of the thoughts I repeatedly have is that this debate exists in a stratosphere which bears very little relation to the actual dreadful state of pre-collegiate and collegiate education. What I see is that at the bottom – and not only the bottom of the educational ladder – we have young people who are peer-oriented, uninvolved in school, a situation in which the things that are best learned early are often not learned at all. And instead of concentrating on these learning tasks, debate revolves around "Afrocentrism," "Eurocentrism," "multiculturalism," assuming that members of groups, including gender, are primarily group members rather than primarily individuals.

I have all sorts of notions that I think might help American blacks in predominantly white colleges and universities. One of them is that if they were to spend a term or a year abroad, they would discover how deeply American they are. Blacks are some of the most American of all Americans, particularly in religious beliefs.

DB: Is there a relationship between the decline in standards and the effort to be inclusive and educate for self-esteem, or is it simply that broad access leads inevitably to a lowering of standards?

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DR: You know, self-esteem is really based on accomplishment. The teachers are convinced of the importance of self-esteem, yet its primacy in the classroom weakens teachers' authority to the point that they can't say anything wounding to self-esteem. This paralyzes them. For example, there is the prevalent assertion, "Tracking is bad." What I see happening now, as a result of the almost overwhelming belief that you mustn't have tracking, is that you bore the gifted students and humiliate the slower students.

DB: Multiculturalism, it seems to me, comes in several forms. One favors the study of various cultures for the sake of new knowledge. And another, which is more controversial, is the belief that the study of non-Western cultures promotes self-esteem in minorities. The debate over multiculturalism has become terribly political.

DR: It's a visible debate, but it's a small part of the mammoth structure of higher education. It operates in the humanities, in history, sociology, anthropology, and social psychology, but not in economics; very little in government; not at all in the sciences. And it isn't something one is going to find to a high degree among the community colleges.

DB: Doesn't the support of a multicultural curriculum have something to do with findings that when black students are asked to read Shakespeare they don't find it interesting? On the other hand, the poetry of Langston Hughes resonates with them; it reflects their dialect. How can educators persuade their students to transcend their particular backgrounds? How do you overcome that?

DR: I'm reminded of a totally contrary story by the founding dean of the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Paul Gagnon, an historian who has been writing on these topics. He has also written about French higher education, so he's multicultural in that larger sense. When UMass/Boston was founded in the sixties it became tilted toward the vulnerable fields of faculty radicalism. The University wanted to adapt to its urban setting along the lines we were just mentioning, including being attractive to black undergraduates. Gagnon ironically recalled that a black student had come to him and asked, "Why can't *we* have Shakespeare? They have him at the Amherst campus." And I thought that was an interesting comment on this very theme. Surely I have no objections to having Langston Hughes in the curriculum. What I'm concerned about on the college level is that students read the same books at the same time and

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that there be a chance for conversation about them. I'm quite open to which books they happen to be.

DB: On the other side of the multiculturalism debate, though, are people who strongly believe that there are universal standards which ought to cross the boundaries of race and culture.

DR: I agree. I very much want books – even though I am not committed to any one group of books – but nevertheless the books should be serious; they should be hard going. They should be, at best, involving – engaging. And they should be shared among a cohort. Certainly not by race or gender. I think of how important it is for the teacher to be able to reach and engage students outside the boundaries of ethnicity or race or gender or class, but I have no objection in principle to moving within the boundaries if that is a way to connect with a particular student. However, one should not make assumptions about what will connect to particular students in advance. My sense of the matter is that much that is dished out to students in public schools under the name of multiculturalism – or even Afrocentrism – will engage only a very few activists among them, if they are black, perhaps in order to be rebellious rather than by virtue of actual engagement with the material. I don't imagine, for example, that Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* will necessarily engage black boys and girls in particular, but I was deeply engaged by it.

DB: With regard to current social pressures, the flip side of the multiculturalism debate is the political correctness one. And it is also linked up with issues of free speech.

DR: Yes. Very much so. The more selective the institution the more likely that there will be these preoccupations with political correctness.

DB: Over the past thirty years, American education has become increasingly targeted by political pressure groups. More and more we are finding that our schools are seen as a mechanism to reform our culture, to either restore traditional values or inculcate new values. It appears that the problem is not so much a lack of vision, but the burden of too many conflicting visions; the notion that the schools must be able to solve all of our problems right away, at the snap of a finger.

DR: I think I like what you say very much. You can't overstate the vulnerability of the schools. And that is new. The schools have much less authority. They've become malleable – they've become utterly malleable,

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partly as a result, as you suggest, of the wildly optimistic notion that the schools are the remedy for all the social ailments, that you can turn to them to fix whatever needs fixing and "right away." Immediately. The notion of the schools as a sort of cultural ballast, some kind of continuity, some kind of slow generativity, is lost in this sense of immediacy. A kind of pragmatism has arisen which in fact is wildly impractical because it overstates so profoundly the role of the schools and fails to recognize all the rest of the influences on young people.

Because of this terrible logic we're talking about, the schools get weaker. They get weaker still because they become vulnerable to really rather slight pressures over which an issue can be made, over which a mobilization can occur. Now, for example, such efforts are just beginning to establish, so to speak, quotas for gay and lesbians. Special campus living arrangements even have been discussed at Cornell University, modeled on the "Afro-American" house or other theme houses. There is much to be said for a theme house based on an intellectual interest; a theme house based on a group interest is something else again, whether it's black or Hispanic or Jewish or whatever. But if this is happening at the highest university levels, schools are even more vulnerable, teachers more at risk.

DB: If the loss of authority was the immediate cause of the malleability of the schools, what brought about the loss of authority? And is this a recent occurrence?

DR: I think it was the counterculture. I say this hesitantly because I'm not sure of my ground here. For a long time I've seen the counterculture, with its antinomian aspects, as having a tremendous influence in delegitimizing authority. The counterculture was made up of predominantly educated, affluent whites. They hooked up with people – now to be called not "Negro" but "black" – such as the Black Panthers, who exploited them and sold them the little red books of Mao Tse Tung, which even the Panthers didn't take seriously. I see the whites as gullible. "Black" became the victor over "Negro." The counterculture had its most disastrous impact on the blacks – the name change being one element. It delegitimized the Negro bourgeosie. Whites have in some measure recovered. The blacks have not recovered. The counterculture is now "a black thing," much of the time. Rap music. The assumption that one has to be "authentically black."

Now one has to ask why authority was so vulnerable in the first place. One would have to then ask the more profound questions of why all institutions in our society have lost authority, not only universities. Certainly the government has. The media which has brought the news

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also has. The part of *The Lonely Crowd* that I think holds up best is the political section. The world of the "inside-dopester" and the "curdled indignants" is with us more than before. It was almost pathetic in the last election when we had the Perot phenomenon – the indignants who knew what needed to be done.

DB: In other words, instead of us saying, "We need to raise our standards," we're blaming.

DR: Yes that's right. And there are also the catastrophic consequences of contemporary economics. I'm old enough to remember the Hoover era, and I can see a very nasty economic future.

DB: Are you optimistic about the future, in light of what we've talked about?

DR: The counterculture had less hegemony in the South and Midwest than in "bi-coastal America." There's so much energy in this country. There's so much intelligence. There's so much decency that I think we're entitled to hope the future can be less grave than it now appears to be. But I see many obstacles. One of them is our litigiousness. That's again an example of the anarchic individualism that we keep coming back to as a hazardous characteristic of America. An anarchic individual can operate also, as we've talked about, at the group level; mobilizers in a group can act as if they speak for every individual in the group. Individualistic individualism is less onerous to this country than so-called group individualism, which threatens us with divisiveness.

In terms of our schools, I think it is possible that we can reverse course. However, I do know for instance that the Clinton administration, although it appointed an excellent Secretary of Education in the former Governor Riley of South Carolina, is not going to pursue national standardized educational tests because of the bad news they will bring. Paradoxically, when the modern university, and primary education too, "serves" the culture, by simply reflecting it, it actually does harm, for it gives legitimacy, just as you note, to the relativism, anti-authoritarianism, and irresponsibility and lack of discipline in the general society; it even provides a cynical, educated veneer over these dangerous qualities. At the very simplest level, there should at least be some sort of common conversation about important topics and books, at the undergraduate level and in graduate departments as well. Otherwise, we will move from "other-direction" to no direction at all.

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SUSAN DUNN

French Anti-Semitism and the Cult of the Soil

Jews teaching Arabs to grow *bananas*? If Maurice Barrès, the famous right-wing French nationalist and anti-Dreyfusard, had climbed into a Time Machine a hundred years ago and been able to read in a recent issue of *The New York Times* about Israelis instructing their Arab neighbors to do just that – to turn the Egyptian desert into acre upon acre of sunny banana groves – he probably would have been startled right out of his magic seat. Today, the agricultural realities of Israel stand in bold contradiction to centuries of anti-Semitic French mythology, which traditionally has feared the takeover of France by bands of international Jewish financiers who held the French "land" not just in their pocketbooks, but worse, in contempt.

And yet, as some of the most famous early Zionists recognized, there were germs of truth in certain elements of this mythology. Today, what Jews once viewed as an insidiously anti-Semitic and hopelessly retrograde doctrine – the cult of the soil – is now embraced as one of the pillars of Jewish nationalism.

Indeed, even the philo-Semitic Abbé Grégoire, one of the leaders of the French Revolution and great heroes in the struggle for Jewish emancipation, discerned some truth in the age-old story that the Jews were always nomads and shepherds, never farmers. Grégoire sought not to condemn but to understand the Jewish past and mold its future. He sympathetically explained that a wandering people, denied a homeland, excluded from citizenship, and deprived of civil rights, would naturally choose to identify with money values instead of land values, since their only security would be in transportable wealth. Grégoire recognized that Jews made commerce flourish in all corners of the world but regretted that rarely were they "zealous patriots." He wanted not only to make them French citizens but, more important, he wanted to make them French. For this, they would have to be converted to a new cult, the cult of the land. "Once the Jew has become a member of the nation, attached to the State by bonds of pleasure, security, freedom and well-being, we will see his *esprit de corps* diminish, he will not be tempted to locate his

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wealth elsewhere, since his land [*terres*] will tie him down to the province where he acquired it: he will cherish his mother, that is to say his *patrie*, whose interests will be indistinguishable from his own."

Grégoire, not unlike Edmund Burke, recognized that citizenship was more complex than rational principles, social contracts, and individual rights; the Enlightenment logic behind the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen would not be enough to turn Jews into Frenchmen. Thus, at the forefront of progressive revolutionary thought, the message was clear: the Jew must become attached to the French soil. "It is probable," wrote Grégoire, "that within a short time, the Jews will devote themselves to agriculture." This was Grégoire's final wish: the Jew becomes not only a patriot but a peasant.

Other eighteenth-century texts favoring Jewish emancipation also stressed the desirability and possibility of vital bonds between the Jews and the earth. Lakind Hourwitz, in 1788, writing in response to the question "Are there ways to make Jews happier and more useful in France?", replied that the Jews could indeed bond with the French earth, offering as proof several treatises on agriculture from the Talmud, including the section entitled *Kilayim* which dealt principally with plants that could be sown and cultivated together. Similarly, the *Cahier de Doléances* composed by the Jews of Alsace asked King Louis XVI for permission to own and cultivate land. The Prince de Broglie, giving his official opinion in 1789 on the "Admission of Jews to the Civil State," argued that rules prohibiting Jewish ownership of land should be abolished so that Jews might turn to agriculture.

But the notion of Jewish participation in agriculture remained an elusive dream. During the next century, French anti-Semitic mythology portrayed the Jew as the quintessential capitalist and speculator, the harbinger of the dreaded modern, urban world. Jules Michelet, the great nineteenth-century French historian and myth-maker, concisely expressed the key elements in this vision:

> The Jews, whatever be said of them, have a country – the London Stock Exchange; they operate everywhere, but they are rooted in the country of gold. Now that the funds of every state are in their hands, what can they love? The land of the status quo – England. What can they hate? The land of progress - France.

Historians of the day agreed that Jewish wealth and financial speculation corresponded to the Jewish condition of statelessness. Michelet pointed out that "the Jew has always put his faith in profit, in money. During great upheavals, he told himself that wealth was his only security.

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. . . What kind of wealth? The kind that is easiest to keep or to save, light and transportable - nothing other that gold. But better still than gold was invisible wealth, gold placed in sure hands. If the Phoenicians, as it is said, invented writing, the Jews almost simultaneously invented the bank note." Jewish wealth was not located in the material world of land, but rather in the immaterial world of numbers: the myth of hidden, conspiratorial Jewish power remained intact.

It is somewhat ironic that Michelet, an intellectual who spent his life writing and teaching history and who knew little of the world outside the Sorbonne, hated capitalism because it evoked for him an abstract intellectual system, fatally divorced from industry and production. He never transcended his nostalgia for the traditional world of the artisan and continued to view industrial production in such a light, as a vital, material, creative process that could never have anything in common with the rational speculation of capitalism. Jews, he imagined, inhabited an inhuman world in which numbers circulated instead of human beings. Comparing France's social classes to geological layers, he purported to discover real warmth and vitality in the lower strata, that is, in the peasant class. But in the higher strata, populated by Jews, he found only ice. "It is like the cold of the Alps, the region of snows. Moral vegetation gradually disappears, and the flower of nationality grows pale. If I ascend one step higher, there is the pure egotism of the calculator who has no fatherland, where people are no longer people but numbers. This is a true glacier, abandoned by nature."

From the vertical vantage point of their invisible, abstract wealth, it is not surprising that, in the resourceful anti-Semitic imagination, the Jews ascended to establish themselves as the financial kings of Europe. According to Michelet, they "solved the problem of volatizing wealth; liberated by international monetary exchange, now they are free, they are the masters; after adding insult to injury, there they are, sitting on the throne of the world." This preposterous idea that the Jews were the financial kings of Europe was a commonplace in mid-nineteenth-century France, disputed by few. It was the thesis of an extremely influential book, *Les Juifs, rois de l'époque,* written in 1845 by Alphonse Toussenel, a follower of the socialist Charles Fourier. Whereas conservatives were not threatened by capitalism and banking, it was socialists in the mid-nineteenth century who were staunchly opposed to capitalist finance and who accused the Jews of creating a retrograde financial feudalism. Although some socialists were troubled by Toussenel's virulent and obsessive anti-Semitism, his book was nevertheless reviewed in socialist periodicals as a serious work that illuminated France's fundamental problem, Jewish financial hegemony.

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The House of Rothschild seems to have been made to order to buttress the myth of the Jewish economic domination of Europe. James Rothschild, the head of the Paris branch of the family, was routinely referred to as Rothschild the First. Hannah Arendt remarked with some amazement that the Rothschild family, unique in their fabulous wealth, came to represent the "whole economic and political significance of the Jewish people," providing a virtually inexhaustible source of anti-Jewish propaganda. And yet Arendt also points out that the Rothschild family's aversion to citizenship in one single country could explain, if not justify, accusations of Jewish statelessness. Arendt noted that Meyer Amschel Rothschild, the founder of the House, preferred the advantages of being an inter-European family to the responsibilities of citizenship in one nation. "The establishment of his five sons in the five financial capitals of Europe - Frankfurt, Paris, London, Naples and Vienna – was his way out of the embarrassing emancipation of the Jews. . . . To the outer world, this one family also became a symbol of the working reality of Jewish internationalism in a world of nation-states and nationally organized peoples. Where, indeed, was there better proof of the fantastic concept of a Jewish world government than in this one family, nationals of five different countries, prominent everywhere?"

For Michelet, Jewish wealth, epitomized by the immense fortune of the Rothschilds, proved that Jews could neither understand nor share in the French system of values, for, he finally admitted, the true glory of France lay in her poverty. Michelet deftly transformed France's relative industrial backwardness into a virtue, making the improbable claim that France's spiritual wealth outshined England's industrial success. "No," he wrote, "it is not the industrial machines of England that give life to the world. It is the breath of France in whatever state she may be, the latent heat of her Revolution that Europe always carries within her." Poverty strangely became one of the key themes in French nationalism. "Work then, O France, to remain poor!" Whereas England assiduously devoted herself to increasing her own wealth, the national mission of France was the salvation of the world, a Christ-like task that she could undertake because of her boundless generosity and could accomplish because of her martyr-like capacity for sacrifice: "If it were possible to amass all the blood, the gold, and the various offerings that each nation disinterestedly bequeathed to the welfare of mankind, France would be a pyramid climbing toward heaven. But your pyramid, O nations, the mass of all the sacrifices you have made through the ages would rise no higher than a child's knee! So do not say, 'France looks so pale,' for she has given her blood for you." The citizens who constituted this messianic nation were of course not bankers and financiers, but most definitely their opposite, humble peasants. The peasant "is not only the most numerous part of the

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nation, but also the strongest, the healthiest, and the best if we honestly weigh all of the physical and moral aspects." And in this vision, the Jewish capitalist, detached from the cult of the soil, stands out as the anti-peasant.

Thomas Jefferson, a devout Francophile, had also stressed the importance of agriculture and the virtues of those who work the land. In his *Notes on Virginia* he even wrote that "those who labor the earth are the chosen people of God, if he ever had a chosen people." Farmers were the "chosen people," however, not because they cultivated the land, but because they cultivated republican virtue. Jefferson admired their independence which he deemed the most important protection against political despotism: "Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. . . . It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigor." Whereas Jefferson's aim was always the preservation of an independent republican state, Michelet associated the cultivation of the land with spiritual transcendence rather than with political health and survival.

Michelet explicitly excluded the Jew from the Christ-like French nation and from the profound and quasi-sexual bonding that he imagined between the peasant and the soil: "The shepherd wanders on the surface of the land; he is the faithless lover. The farmer is the husband; he tears off her green belt and plants the double seed of grain and sweat. The permanent union of man and woman sooner or later produces another marriage, that of man and land." One of the popular scenarios in novels of the day was the capitalist's victimization of the peasant: the banker, whose predatory reach extends from the city to the country, expropriates the peasant's land, destroying his independence, strength, and will to live. Michelet sounded the alarm: "If the peasant becomes the serf of the usurer, he will not only be miserable, but will lose heart. And what kind of race would rise in such conditions, terrorized by the Jews?"

The economic underpinnings of this anti-Semitic mythology lay in the abyss separating land value from money value in France. Money and other forms of transportable wealth were disparaged in a country in which property, *real* estate, had always been associated with privilege and status. In 1790, Edmund Burke had commented on the dichotomy in France between land and money, pointing out that landed and moneyed interests were far more separate and less miscible than in England, where the two interests together formed a dynamic combination that promoted economic progress.

For his part, Tocqueville confirmed and expanded upon Burke's comments. In France, Tocqueville reminds us, the nobility, traditionally prohibited from entering commerce and industry, associated power and prestige with ownership of the land. For the members of this land-owning

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caste, great monetary wealth evoked only weakness and inferiority. But with his typical lucidity, Tocqueville recognized that, in the nineteenth century, the role of land was in flux. Impoverished nobles could become wealthier by selling their land and investing their capital; poor people could make money by cultivating the land; and men who had made immense fortunes could enjoy their financial success by withdrawing their money from commerce and purchasing the ultimate luxury item, land. Land had become an integral part of the system of commerce, and Tocqueville was pleased to see the stage set for political, social and economic development.

But despite Tocqueville's realistic appraisal, the mythic aura surrounding the notion of the French soil did not disappear. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anti-Dreyfusards and right-wing nationalists, such as Edouard Drumont, Paul Bourget, Maurice Barrès, Charles Maurras, Georges Bernanos, and many others, would continue to galvanize patriotic sentiment by portraying the Jews in France as a fifth column, hostile to the land itself, subverting the attachment of the French to their own soil.

Hannah Arendt offered a different hypothesis for late nineteenth-century anti-Semitism. She believed that its resurgence occurred at a time when Jewish financial power was in decline and when the privileges Jews enjoyed could no longer be justified by the role they played in society. Raymond Aron generously called this explanation, which compares the situation of the late nineteenth-century French Jews to that of eighteenth-century French nobles, "too subtle." Instead, he viewed anti-Semitism in turn-of-the-century France as a product of nationalist myths based on a nostalgia for the Old France. Maurice Barrès and his cohorts were, for Aron, revolting "against the triumph of money, against the rise on the social ladder of the Jews who had *no roots in the land* [*déracinés*]." This was traditional, reactionary French anti-Semitism. Ugly, but a far cry from the murderous, imperialist anti-Semitism of the Germans, although Aron cautions that the antecedent of the monstrous crime of the deaths of six million Jews lay in *all* theories that posited differences between the Jews and others.

And yet many people are convinced that the real racist version of anti-Semitism that took hold in Germany had little influence in France. Even though this appealing interpretation would have been of little comfort to the Jews deported from France, I also tend to think that the French, or at least most of them, never adopted the implacable view that Jews were inherently, irredeemably bad. As the historian David Landes suggests, the French shared a national conviction that *la civilisation française* could redeem anyone, of any color or religion. The Jew could become a

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citizen of France and could even be converted to the love of the soil. And the Jews were so converted - although their conversion has been more striking in Israel than in France.

Jewish attitudes toward agriculture formed one of the most interesting and significant debates at the first World Zionist Congress. On one side of the spectrum was Herzl's progressive ideology that dismissed the idea of Jewish peasants. In 1896 Herzl wrote: "Those who would attempt to convert Jews into peasants are committing a truly astonishing error. For the peasant is a creature of the past. The agrarian question is only a question of machinery. The peasant is a type which is on the way to extinction. . . . To create new peasants on the old pattern is an absurd and impossible undertaking. No one is wealthy or powerful enough to make civilization take a single step backward." The first wave of immigrants might be forced to toil on the land, but only out of sheer necessity: "The exodus of the Jews will be gradual. The poorest will go first and cultivate the soil. They will construct roads, bridges, railways. The labor invested in the soil will enhance its value. The emigrants standing lowest in the economic scale will be gradually followed by those of the next grade."

But for other founding Zionists, like Max Nordau, Aaron David Gordon, and Beryl Katznelson, the bond with the land was essential to Jewish nationhood. Labor on the land was not merely, as Herzl indicated, a means to "enhance" its value; labor on the land was a means for the spiritual redemption of a people. Max Nordau dreamt that the Jews would "irrigate with their sweat and till with their hands a country that is today a desert, until it again becomes the blooming garden it once was."

The Zionist Aaron David Gordon ringingly condemned the "plague" that had affected the Jews for countless generations, that is, "the rent between ourselves and Nature. . . . We despise labor, we must realize how *abnormal* we are in this respect, how alien labor has become to the life of the nation." Just as French nationalists insisted that French nationhood was founded less on rational Enlightenment principles than on the emotional and physical bonds between the Frenchman and the French earth, and that the *principle* of *liberté* was less important in creating a nation than the *feeling* of *fraternité,* Gordon similarly maintained that Jewish nationhood needed to be founded on bonds deeper than political ideology and historical memory. He dreamed not of an intellectual, religious, or political culture but as a culture rooted in the land itself.

As if he had been taught the love of the soil and the value of *enracinement* from French right-wing nationalists, this passionate advocate of labor and agriculture decried the age-old Jewish distance from the soil: "The Jewish people has been completely cut off from nature and imprisoned within city walls these two thousand years. . . . Labor is not only the force

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which binds man to the soil and by which possession of the soil is acquired; it is also the basic energy for the creation of a national culture. This is what we do not have. Judging from the deliberations at the Zionist Congress, culture is entirely a mastery of ideas or ideology. . . . Farming, building and road-making is part of culture and is indeed the foundation and the stuff of culture." Like Maurice Barrès, Aaron David Gordon affirmed that nationhood is created by a people "rooted in its soil." But unlike Barrès and other French intellectuals who loved the soil in theory only, the Zionists built irrigation systems, tilled the earth, and harvested its crops.

Political mythology is fluid. Political myths pass effortlessly from one side of the political spectrum to the other. The international banker of the House of Rothschild could be the foreign enemy of France until, in the form of Georges Pompidou, he became the President of the Fifth Republic. Similarly, the same anti-Semitic myths could belong to mid-nineteenth-century socialists before they became the property, forty years later, of their right-wing adversaries. Perhaps more surprising, the cult of the soil, too, passed from right-wing anti-Semitic French nationalists easily into the hands of some of the early Zionists. One hundred years after the arrest, "degradation," and deportation of Alfred Dreyfus in 1894, we are still playing with the same deck of political cards, dealing, discarding, and reshuffling the same myths, the same fears and hatreds, the same hopes, the same ideals.

Have the Israelis added a new card to the deck? Some of them have found that the most effective path to nationhood and peace in that part of the world is through healthy and vital bonds with the land, for *all* the people living on it. These Israelis have discovered that not only do bananas in the desert - that ancient cult of the soil - create a nation, they may create something even better – two nations, interdependent and sovereign.

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VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

Romania's Mystical Revolutionaries

Few stories in this century are more fascinating than the intellectual history of Romania's mystical revolutionaries of the 1930s. Until recently, the activities of the intellectuals associated with the "legionnaires of the Archangel Michael" have almost universally been glossed over with a veil of silence and presented as an ephemeral, almost insignificant episode in their tumultuous *Lehrjahre*. Nor have any of the participants engaged in soul-searching to detect the reasons for their youthful obsession. What followed after 1940 has been a long, and one must say, successful exercise of willed amnesia. Yet in the preceding decades, the fascist commitment of the "Young Generation," and its identification with the Iron Guardist movement, was the most straightforward expression of nationalism and anti-Semitism to be found in Eastern Europe.

Mircea Eliade wrote in *Itinerar spiritual,* a 1927 series of essays published in *Cuvintul,* what became the group's credo: the old generation created Great Romania, the young one would create a great culture. Political geography was insufficient: a spiritual realm was required for a nation to exist. Although influenced by the apostles of traditional Romanian nationalism, from Mihai Eminescu and B. P. Hasdeu to Nicolae Iorga and Vasile Parvan, the members of this group were nevertheless attracted to Europe's then new cultural trends: surrealism, expressionism, syndicalism, psychoanalysis, and the study of esoteric creeds and religions. Spellbound by their readings of Pascal, Joseph de Maistre, Schopenhauer, Berdiayev, d'Annunzio, Sorel, Maurras, Klages, Spengler, Bakunin, and Papini, they dreamt of a new Middle Age, exalting the values of organic community based on a heroic sense of sacrifice and martyrdom. The cult of excess was the hallmark of their *Weltanschauung.* The tradition of the dissatisfied, skeptical, tragically depressed writer was internalized and embellished by them.

They represented a Balkan counterpart to the revolutionary aristocratism preached by Ernst Jünger and other proponents of the Germanic resurrection: they were anti-bourgeois, anti-mercantile, anti-democratic. The centrality of anti-Semitism in this philosophy was linked both to the rejection of the economic and political forms associated in East-Central Europe with Jews as agents of capitalist transformations and to the per-

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ception of Judaism as inimical to the Christian Orthodox cement of Romanianism. In a country like Romania, with its predominantly agrarian and illiterate population, with a corrupt and often irresponsible political class, the anti-liberal and mystical revolutionary rhetoric of the far right was bound to excite and galvanize the intellectual elite.

In *Romania's Transfiguration,* published in Bucharest in 1937, the young E. M. Cioran wrote: "The Jews are unique in every way. Bent by a curse for which only God is responsible, they are matchless. If I were a Jew, I would commit suicide immediately." (He would later recall his words as an expression of a love-hate relationship with the Jewish people and tradition.) Cioran had triumphantly entered the Romanian literary world in 1934 with his book *On the Heights of Despair* (recently reissued, in a masterful translation by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, by the University of Chicago Press). The book is full of overblown metaphors, linguistic somersaults, and conceptual precipices. It was not a banal debut. Nothing in Cioran's intellectual life had been banal. Indeed, the angry young man's nihilistic creed was crowned with the prize of the Young Romanian Writers' Association along with *No*, Eugène Ionesco's first and only volume written in Romanian.

The third recipient of this prestigious award was Constantin Noica, born in 1909, who was to be the only member of the Generation to remain in Romania, survive Communist jails and harassment, and become, at the end of his life in 1987, a cultural model for Romania's young intellectuals. To his credit, Emil Cioran, who left Romania for France in 1938 and never went back, has been the only member of the Generation to have dealt, albeit in an delphic way, with his initial Fascist commitment. In a famous essay, actually an open letter addressed to his friend the philosopher Constantin Noica in 1957, "Lettre à un ami lointain," Cioran insisted on the Generation's marked hostility to and even scorn for parliamentary democracy:

> Happier than me, you have resignated yourself to our native dust; in addition, you have the faculty of being able to bear all regimes, even the most rigid ones. Not that you don't have the nostalgia for fantasy and disorder, but I don't know a spirit more opposed than yours to the superstitions of "democracy." True, there was a time when I detested it as much as you did, probably even more: I was young and I could not admit other truths than mine, neither could I concede to the adversary the right to have his truths, to invoke or to impose them. The fact that parties could confront each other without annihilating each other went beyond my capacity for comprehension. . . . The systems that tried to supplant it seemed to me beautiful without

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> exception, attuned to the movement of Life, my divinity of those times. For the one who, before thirty, did not experience the fascination with all forms of extremism, I don't know whether to feel admiration or contempt, whether to consider him a saint or a cadaver.

Years later Cioran further emphasized his distance from the Iron Guard by speaking with undisguised contempt for the movement. The problem, however, is not whether Cioran ever pledged the membership oath to the Iron Guard. Too anarchic, too self-centered and undisciplined to accept the Legionary rituals, Cioran, and many others, nevertheless were intimately linked to the intellectual climate of unbound national fanaticism and anti-democratic furor that accompanied and favored the Guard's activities. Although later Mircea Eliade would deny having been enrolled in the Iron Guard, in 1937 he published an article in the Guardist newspaper *Buna Vestire* titled, "Why I Believe in the Triumph of the Legionary Movement," a most vibrant endorsement:

> I believe in the destiny of the Romanian people. That is why I believe in the victory of the Legionary movement. A nation that has demonstrated huge powers of creation at all levels of reality cannot be shipwrecked at the periphery of history in a Balkanized democracy, in a civil catastrophe. . . . I believe in the destiny of our nation. I believe in the Christian revolution of the new man. I believe in freedom, personality and love. Therefore, I believe in the victory of the Legionary movement, in a proud and powerful Romania, in a new way of life that will transform the riches of the Romanian soul into universal spiritual values.

In truth, Eliade, the recognized spiritual leader of the Young Generation, was not alone in his Guardist exaltation. Cioran himself contributed to the ultra-nationalist and Guardist newspapers with articles eulogizing Hitler and Nazi Germany and urging Romanians to relinquish their lukewarm psychology and enjoy the politics of delirium. While young Eugène Ionesco remained a true democrat, equally opposed to Bolshevism and Nazism, the great French *moraliste* E. M. Cioran – the worshipper of Vladimir Soloviev and Leon Shestov, the man who later would write superb pages about the Romanian-born Jewish poet Benjamin Fondane who was gassed at Auschwitz – unambiguously endorsed the totalitarians of the extreme right.

In their support for the Iron Guard's ideology, philosophers like Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran illustrated what Hannah Arendt once rightly called "the temporary alliance between the mob and the

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elite." With few exceptions, they never used the scurrilous language of the rank-and-file Guardists: they were too refined for that. What they did was to convince the boys and the girls of the Legionary death squads (*echipele mortii*) that dying for the "Capitan" (as the Guard's leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was called) meant dying for Romania. In an ironic twist, what started as the cult of creative life culminated in the mystique of heroic death. Eugène Ionesco recalled in an 1970 interview the spiritual-political atmosphere in Romania of the 1930s and the "ideological contagion" of the Nazi virus:

> University professors, students, intellectuals were turning Nazi, becoming Iron Guards, one after the other. We were some fifteen people who used to get together, to discuss, to try to find arguments opposing theirs. It was not easy. . . . From time to time, one of our group would come out and say: "I don't agree at all with them, to be sure, but on certain points, nevertheless, I must admit, for example, the Jews. . . ." And that kind of comment was a symptom. Three weeks later, that person would become a Nazi. He was caught in the mechanism, he accepted everything, he became a rhinoceros. Toward the end, it was only three or four of us who resisted.

To be sure, Cioran and Eliade wrote their ignominious pro-Nazi pieces before Auschwitz. Still their lack of awareness about what was in store for Jews in the Nazi-controlled Europe dumbfounds. For instance, writing in February 1937, after the promulgation of the Nuremberg racist legislation and one year before *Kristallnacht,* Mircea Eliade justified his sympathy to National Socialism by invoking Bolshevik anti-religious zeal: "Whatever I am told about Hitlerite terrorism, I cannot forget that in the very center of Berlin there stands a synagogue, solemn and untainted - unlike any church in Russia." This strategy of "comparative trivialization" (as Peter Gay calls it) is subliminally linked to the fallacy of a Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy. More recently, this vision has resurfaced in Ernst Nolte's attempt to explain the Jewish Holocaust as part of a "European civil war" in which Hitler's perception of a presumed Jewish-Bolshevik threat to subjugate the Germans motivated his "preemptive" mass-murderous program.

In December 1933, almost a year after Hitler's takeover, young Cioran glowingly celebrated the Nazi neo-pagan dramaturgy: "I like the Hitlerites because of their cult of the irrational, their exaltation of vitality as such, their virile expansion of energy, without any critical spirit, with-

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out reserve and without control." By mid-1934, following a trip to Munich (during his 1933-35 Humboldt scholarship study in Nazi Germany, where he went together with Noica, who studied in Freiburg under Martin Heidegger), Cioran went even further with his frantic encomia for the Nazi revolution:

> There is no politician in the world today who inspires my sympathy and admiration to a greater extent than Hitler. . . . The mysticism of the Führer in Germany is fully justified. . . . It is Hitler's merit that he has ravished the critical spirit of a nation. . . . Hitler has poured a fiery passion into political struggles and dynamized an entire domain of values, reduced by democratic rationalism to platitudes and trivialities, with a Messianic spirit. All of us need mysticism because we are tired of so many truths which do not spark a flame.

Such Cioran texts have been ignored by those seduced by the elegant (though somewhat pompous and grandiloquent) aphorisms that were later to ensure his French and international glory. Once he left Romania, it was as if Cioran had also left behind a world of frightening deformities, irresponsible vagaries, and devastating nightmares. According to his confessions made in different interviews published in Germany, Italy and Spain (he systematically shunned interviews in the French media), this "transfiguration" took place during the years he spent in Nazi-occupied Paris. What he did during those years in terms of professional occupation is still unknown. However, it is known that until 1944, he continued to receive a fellowship from the French Institute. France had ceased to exist as an independent country, so the logical conclusion is that the money came from the Vichy regime. During those days Walter Benjamin committed suicide, and Benjamin Fondane, Cioran's personal friend, died at Auschwitz. Did he know about the scope of the horror? Was it possible for an intellectual of his caliber to simply ignore the Nazi anti-Jewish measures, including the notorious *rafle* at the Velodrome d'Hiver in 1942?

While Cioran was not a Guardist himself, his mentor Nae Ionescu was, and so were (for short periods of time, to be sure) other members of the Generation, including Constantin Noica.The best analysis of Nae Ionescu's political demonism and the relationship between the Professor (as he was revered by his disciples in the Generation) and the Iron Guard has been provided by Mircea Vulcanescu, a philosopher belonging to Cioran's generation, in a book written in 1942, completed in 1945-46, but published in Romania only in 1992. Never an Iron Guardist, Vulcanescu served in Marshal Ion Antonescu's pro-Nazi government as undersecretary of state at the Ministry of Finances and died in 1952 in a

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Communist jail. For him, Nae Ionescu was a consummate Machiavellian who managed to beguile a whole generation and thus change its destiny. The Professor's post-1933 idyll with the Iron Guard was part of his search for the political force that could fulfill his ethno-theocratic ideal. Regarded by some as an intellectual crackpot, adored by others as a metaphysical genius, Ionescu died in 1940 at the age of fifty, shortly before the triumph of the Iron Guard.

A religious thinker, Nae Ionescu yearned for the figure of the national redeemer, the charismatic leader who would restore the spiritual value of human existence and make possible the country's "resurrection" from the execrated democratic shambles. But he was too profound a philosopher, Vulcanescu argues, not to doubt the ultimate legitimacy of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the Iron Guard's captain, to claim such a mystically privileged status.

In short, Nae Ionescu embraced the Guard's political views because of the affinities between the movement's visceral anti-democratism and his own distrust of Western liberalism. Nae Ionescu's theoretically founded anti-Semitism was rooted in his conception of an immutable ethnic structure: Romanianness was almost a genetic given, and no effort to acquire this status could succeed. In 1934, the novel *For Two Thousand Years* by Iosef Hechter (under the pen name of Mihail Sebastian), which was a parable of the dilemma of Jewish assimilation in the Danubian and Carpathian space as well as a *roman à clef* about the intellectual debates among the Young Generation's members, was published. Nae Ionescu responded to it by publishing a "Preface" to the novel, in which he admonishes:

> You are sick, Iosef Hechter. You are essentially sick because you cannot but suffer; and because your suffering does not lead anywhere. Everybody is suffering, Iosef Hechter. We Christians also are suffering. But we have a way out, because we can redeem ourselves. I know you are hoping, hoping that he for whom you wait will come. The Messiah, on his white horse, and then you will rule the earth. You are hoping, Iosef Hechter. This is the only thing left to you. But I cannot do anything for you. Because I know that the Messiah you wait for will not come. The Messiah has already come, Iosef Hechter, and you did not recognize him. All you were asked to do in exchange for all the good things God offered you was to be on the watch. And you did not watch. Or you failed to see, because vanity covered your eyes with scales. . . . Iosef Hechter, don't you feel the grip of the cold and darkness?

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Jehuda semper patet: Thus spoke Nae Ionescu. More disturbing was that the paragons of the Young Generation took his arguments at face value and engaged in a theological dispute about the Jewish chances for salvation. With his extraordinary magnetism – remembered by Eliade in his memoirs – Nae Ionescu contributed decisively to the "Guardist Conversion" of the Generation. In the context of the Nazi racial revolution and the murderous actions of the Iron Guard, Nae Ionescu's lines represented a pseudo-theological warrant for genocide. To exonerate him and present his views as a legitimate dogmatic stance, as some Romanian intellectuals have lately done, is morally idiotic and intellectually dishonest. I totally agree with Matei Calinescu, who considers that the "Preface" to *For Two Thousand Years* was one of the first major cases of "rhinocerization" among the Romanian intellectuals of the time, "serving as an unfortunate but mesmerizing example to many of the younger writers, journalists, philosophers, professors, and artists who, after 1933, but particularly after 1934, joined the Iron Guard in droves."

Such exoneration is particularly disquieting today in post-Ceausescu Romania, where many within the new generation of students and intellectuals identify themselves with the spirit of the rebellious radicals of the thirties. For instance, student leader Marian Munteanu has founded an organization called *Miscarea pentru Romania* (The Movement for Romania) and invoked Nae Ionescu and his school as his models. Both Ionescu's "Preface" and Cioran's *Romania's Transfiguration* have recently been reprinted by Humanitas Publishing House in Romania. The head of Humanitas is Gabriel Liceanu, Constantin Noica's main disciple and anointed heir (and currently an adamant critic of the Iliescu regime). In 1992, Liceanu himself published a book called *Cearta cu filosofia* (*The Quarrel with Philosophy*), in which he performed a lengthy *tour de force* in examining Cioran's theoretical tribulations without any reference whatsoever to Cioran's Fascist past. Not surprisingly, one cannot find any anti-Semitic fulminations in the meticulously revised edition of *Romania's Transfiguration,* whose updating Cioran personally supervised. The whole fourth chapter, titled "National Collectivism," as well as the long aforementioned passages referring to the need for more fanaticism in Romania's politics, has been carefully deleted. The preserved passages on Jews do not lend themselves to moral objections in the light of the Holocaust. The reader who might have expected Cioran to have elaborated on these problems will be disappointed. Neither he nor Liceanu found it necessary to offer a critical introduction to a book that was one of the main manifestos of European Fascism in its "National Bolshevik" version.

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The truly odd thing is that instead of the usual copyright notice, Humanitas (certainly with Cioran's blessing) printed the following: "The first two editions appeared in 1936 and 1941. The current edition is the only authorized version." To make things more explicit, the octogenarian Cioran composed the following caution: "I wrote these divagations in 1935-36, at the age of twenty-four, with passion and *orgueuil*. Of all I have published in Romanian and French, this text is perhaps the most passionate. It also is the most alien to me. I do not rediscover myself in it, although the presence of my then hysteria strikes me as obvious. I saw it as my duty to suppress some pretentious and stupid pages. This is the definitive edition. Nobody has the right to change it." Cioran may have changed his mind (it was Claudel who once wrote that *ce sont seulement les imbéciles qui ne changent pas d'avis*), but his early Romanian writings exist and should be freely examined. With its lionization of the hysterical crowds, his book belongs to the impetus that helped establish the Fascist dictatorship in Romania, the bloody prelude to the next, no less ruthless Communist tyranny. Although subdued and cryptic, Cioran's short warning at least does imply that he repents for his juvenile aberrations. In contrast, Eliade, as Norman Manea rightly pointed out in his essay "Felix Culpa," never explicitly abjured his Guardist commitment.

The reissue of Cioran's first book shows it still to be the *cri de coeur* of a metaphysical dandy, a collection of spasmodic aphorisms and reflections written by a young epigone of Nietzsche during insomniac crises of misanthropy and narcissism. The translator's introduction is a perceptive piece of literary history, showing that, from title to conclusions, Cioran's book has a deep ironical dimension, but there is no information about Cioran's fateful political wager. Thus, in the new edition, Cioran's metaphysical lyricism has been artificially distilled and purified from his no less significant political radicalism. One can, of course, accept Cioran's repudiation of his early political blunders, but intellectual history requires some reflection on the relationship between Romania's spiritual elite and the pseudo-Christian, ethnic fundamentalism of the Iron Guard.

The espousal by Cioran and other members of the Young Generation of the Guardist tenets was linked to their entrenched anti-intellectualist and anti-liberal beliefs. Part of their allegiance to the Guard was linked to their cultural inferiority complex: as Cioran once put it, the "vanity of a man born within a small culture is forever wounded." Anti-Semitism was adopted as part of the creation of a much-needed "national myth" which could not be conceived in the absence of an enemy figure. For them the Jews became the symbol of the plutocratic-commercial values they had so much decried in their earlier but not manifestly anti-Semitic writings. In

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times of historical catastrophe, with the Iron Guard singling out the Jews as the main enemy of Romania's renascence, these intellectuals "respectabilized" a direction and a movement that under any circumstances could only be called barbaric. The more they talked about Christian values, the less were they ready to feel any empathy with those who were suffering real persecution.

With their contempt for the idea of natural rights and the Western contractualist tradition, with their glorification of the ethnocratic state and the wild, often insane generalizations about national characteristics (more often than not egregious stereotypes rooted in envy, fear and resentment), they paved the ground for the extreme racist legislation after 1940 and the forcible deportation to and vanishing of Romania's Jews in the Transnistrian camps. The more they insisted that the nation had to assert its purity by contrasting alleged Judaic materialism to Christian Orthodox idealism, the more they anesthetized the population and allowed for insensitivity to real, palpable and murderous forms of "ethnic cleansing."

Leon Volovici's book, *Nationalist Ideology and Anti-Semitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Pergamon Press) is the first systematic attempt to tell the convulsive tale of Romania's inter-war young intellectuals. As he puts it, the theorists of the Messianic national revolution created a climate in which the "Jewish question" became "an acute theme of intellectual life." Fortunately, he places this history against the background of Europe's ideological battle between Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment, with its often misleading images of "total revolution" and frozen archetypes of Left and Right. The merit of Volovici's book is that it offers the Western reader an introduction to the early stage of a thinker who was later to be lionized as the distinguished successor to the lyrical, aphoristic and anti-systematic tradition of philosophizing exemplified by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. When Susan Sontag praised Cioran's "radical will," she was unaware of his intellectual metamorphoses: the little *tache honteuse* in Cioran's biography eluded this proponent of absolute candor and supreme authenticity. Volovici's book is not an indictment. His sober (and somber) conclusion is worth quoting:

> Between the two world wars, few of Romania's intellectuals were extremist anti-Semites, but attachment to a certain idea of national awareness, with a somewhat latent perception of the Jew as an alien, and in certain circumstances as even dangerous, characterized most of them. For this reason there were very few intellectuals who, in the most critical days, adopted the rejection of anti-Jewish discrimination as a cause of their own that they would willingly defend in public. In

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the 1930s, a "Dreyfus affair" was unimaginable in Romania.

The strength of Volovici's book lies in its demonstration of how a group of outstanding writers, inspired by an intellectual guru with Christian pretensions and Mephistophelic influence, made their pact with the darkest forces of this century and never engaged in a serious coming to terms with their own past. Like Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, Cioran has avoided any direct avowal of his Fascist past. The issue of responsibility is not part of his ethical concern. While Volovici offers the first comprehensive and remarkably balanced analysis of this fascinating chapter of intellectual and political history, there is, however, a missing epilogue: the story did not end in the 1930s and 40s, and the Generation has made a spectacular comeback in post-1989 Romania. For instance, former Ceausescu sycophant Dan Zamfirescu re-edited Nae Ionescu's volume *Roza vinturilor* (*The Wind Rose)* with an afterword by Mircea Eliade, and he stated in the foreword that "no other book is more urgently needed to be known and revalued into a direction vital for the national existence of the Romanians." The truth is that no other book, with the exception of Cioran's *Transfiguration,* has had such deleterious effects on the minds and souls of the young Romanians.

Radical ideas do not exist in a vacuum, and their impact on human existence can often be disastrous. Whatever the reasons for young Cioran's moral dissatisfaction, his political wager was tragically wrong. During those times of shame and horror, Cioran, Eliade and their fellow mystical revolutionaries were impervious to what was indeed the revelation of sorrow: the coming of the statistical murders and the appalling realities of the concentration camps. Later, they continued to remain silent, prolonging an abysmal moral error and perpetuating nebulous ambiguities.

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RYSZARD LEGUTKO

The Trouble with Toleration

There is something sacrosanct about toleration in modern political folklore: Without much exaggeration, it can be said that the triumph of liberalism has elevated this category into the ultimate and almost the only generally acceptable litmus test of morality. At the very least, no other single category – not justice, not equality, not even freedom – has won such wide moral support in the Western world. What the radical philosopher Robert Paul Wolff wrote almost thirty years ago would probably arouse little controversy today: just as the basic value of a monarchy is loyalty and that of a military dictatorship is honor, so the basic value of the modern pluralist democracy is tolerance. The common wisdom permeating modern political theory has it that one can get away with anything as long as one is tolerant. Intolerance is more to be feared than all traditional sins. Human vices are deplorable, yet within the framework of toleration they can be tamed and civilized. When this framework is missing, it is believed that our social and political life suffer from mortal disease.

Not surprisingly, the question of whether the concept of toleration deserves such high esteem is rarely taken up today, although the limits of toleration are recognized and few thinkers or politicians would profess a doctrine of absolute toleration, a concept hardly defensible to any nondoctrinaire mind. Yet whenever conflict arises and a new idea or movement challenges the status quo, a call for toleration usually outweighs any demand that such an idea or movement should justify its dissenting position. In fact, to make such a demand is frequently interpreted precisely as an expression of intolerance. Most of those who write about or defend toleration ignore the cost, primarily intellectual and moral, of the puzzling omnipotence which has been given to a category that originally occupied a far more modest position. Logically, it would seem that since the contemporary Western world is much more human – "tolerant," one might say – than Europe of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there should be less need to talk about toleration. What has occurred within our philosophical and moral outlook to keep us preoccupied with a concept which we apparently have been very successful in implementing? Stalin once said that the closer the socialist paradise, the more numerous and more powerful its enemies. Can it be that a similar fear haunts the

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modern liberal conscience?

In the classical formulations of toleration, those of Bayle, Locke, and Voltaire, the first problem one stumbles upon is to what extent toleration has a distinct meaning of its own and to what extent it can be reduced to other notions. Voltaire's *Traite sur la tolerance,* for example, was occasioned by the unjust sentencing to death of Jean Calas, a French Protestant accused of killing his own Catholic son. One wonders to what degree the famous *philosophe* was entitled to speak of toleration in this context. Is justice, fairness, rule of law not enough to prevent similar cases from happening again? Will our judicial system work better if to good laws, good legal institutions, and good judges we add "toleration"? Was Jean Calas sentenced to death because the judiciary system in France did not function properly and because the French did not respect the elementary requirements of justice, or did he die because the French Catholics lacked tolerance?

One of the reasons why these and similar doubts arise is that the intolerance, the opposite of toleration, of which Bayle, Locke, and Voltaire spoke was most often identified with violence of the most brutal kind, as in Locke's "persecute, torment, destroy, and kill other men upon pretence of religion." It is even more strongly illustrated by Voltaire, who wrote of Irish Catholics

> . . . sacrificing, as an acceptable offering, the lives of their Protestant brethren, by burying them alive, hanging up mothers upon gibbets, and tying their daughters round their necks to see them expire together; ripping up women with child, taking the half-formed infant from the womb, and throwing it to swine or dogs to be devoured; putting a dagger into the hands of their manacled prisoners and forcing them to plunge it into the breasts of their fathers, their mothers, their wives, or children, thereby hoping to make them guilty of parricide, and damn their souls while they destroyed their bodies.

The consequence of identifying intolerance with violence, persecution, and cruelty was the conviction that anything lessening the risk of violence, persecution, and cruelty counted as toleration. Thus a call for toleration was, in Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration,* a call for "charity," "faith which works . . . by love," "meekness," "good-will." To these could be added other virtues and rules of behavior to make people's interactions more harmonious: good manners, a sense of justice, tact, knowledge, honesty, respect for others, open-mindedness. It was also asserted that toleration was linked to self-preservation and self-interest: the first manifesting itself in the need for social peace rather than civil wars to

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which anyone could fall victim; the second in the beneficent connection between toleration and trade, which soon became evident to many observers of social life. Yet not only virtues and natural dispositions contributed to neutralizing intolerance and building toleration; various vices could also serve the aim. For instance, hypocrisy, one of those undoubtedly and often condemned human frailties, nevertheless could be useful. Voltaire's treatise gives us a telling anecdote about a Dominican and a Jesuit who had fiercely quarrelled:

> The mandarin being informed of this scandalous behavior ordered them both to be sent to prison. A submandarin asked His Excellence how long he would please to have them remain in confinement. Until they are both agreed, said the judge. Then, my lord, answered the submandarin, they will remain in prison all their days. Well, then, said the mandarin, Let them stay until they forgive one another. That they will never do rejoined the deputy; I know them very well. Indeed, said the mandarin; then let it be until they appear to do so.

The scope given to the concept of toleration in the classics is intriguing. Is there anything specific in toleration that distinguishes it from other apparently related but far more tangible notions and phenomena like kindness or disinterestedness? What will be left of toleration if we deprive it of tact and justice, of love and meekness, of charity and good manners, of knowledge and curiosity, of instincts for self-interest and self-preservation, of hypocrisy and other private vices which are public virtures? If we possess most of these qualities, is it necessary to invoke the concept of toleration? What would be gained?

One plausible answer is that toleration, whatever its precise meaning, is attached to all these virtues, vices, instincts, and habits. Without them, or in opposition to them, or abstracted from them and treated separately as an autonomous quality, toleration is empty and meaningless. Possibly, there is nothing conceptually faulty with insistently relating toleration to other practices of moral behavior; pure toleration, distilled of all related notions, may be dubious and – if separated from related practices - even harmful. Advocating toleration without love, justice, rule of law, self-interest, hypocrisy, and so on may be like advocating courage without the training of character, at best an arid exercise in philosophical speculation and at worst a form of subversion aimed at the most vital and widely shared values of social life. Therefore, such "pure" toleration might well bring results hardly compatible with the ordinary sense of the concept. A tolerant individual could thus be either someone who lives peacefully with his philosophical and religious adversaries, or someone who antago-

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nizes people by ordering them to obey an abstract rule, which he claims will bring peace and harmony to all, unrelated to experience. In the first case, tolerance is a virtue of an individual human character; in the second, a principle to which human habit should conform.

Voltaire himself perfectly illustrated both of these attitudes. There were in fact two Voltaires: the first is the author of *Traite sur la tolerance,* a good Christian (at least pretending to be one), defending toleration as the culmination of many moral components. The other is the Voltaire of *ecrasez l'infame,* the visionary of the Enlightenment who sought to elevate toleration on the ruins of Christianity, the extirpation of which he regarded as the major mission of his life. In his struggle against *l'infame,* Voltaire committed precisely the error that the idea of toleration was meant to prevent. He fell victim to intellectual hubris: armed with his philosophical humanism, he set out to eradicate the evil and falsehood that people – because of the inertia of tradition and ignorance – still allegedly harbored in themselves.

John Locke was more cautious. His *Letters* spelled out a case for toleration that was based on an attitude of humility toward truth. To generalize his insight, one can say that if there is some specificity in the idea of toleration, irreducible to other ideas and habits, it reveals itself in the acceptance of human imperfection; it expresses the effort to put into practice the ultimate moral standards – truth being the most vital one. Locke formulated his argument against the magistrates who claimed the power to punish the false religion and to defend the true one. We need toleration, he argued, when we do not have the knowledge or certainty of what is true, or when the nature of controversy is such that it precludes the establishment of any common ground. The latter case clearly applies to religious conflicts which, as Locke repeated emphasized, are to a considerable degree a matter of faith and cannot be settled through rational argument. The purpose of toleration was to draw the attention of all parties involved to the danger of arrogant and hasty transformation of true or seemingly true concepts into political instruments.

Such a rendering of toleration was clearly modest, and there was not much philosophy in it, except perhaps an implied empiricist distrust of abstract and aprioristic formulas functioning as criteria in political life. This version of toleration is often called negative: it usually limits itself to negative qualifications. Contrary to what Voltaire the prophet of the Enlightenment (in contrast to the Voltaire of *Traite*) thought, it neither indicates truth nor promotes it, nor even helps intellectually in the process of establishing truth. Toleration does not presuppose any identifiable metaphysics or ethics or political philosophy. Locke and Voltaire (in his *Treatise*), while stressing that toleration and truth are in practice related,

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did not say that truth as such is a repressive notion. They did not therefore suggest that in the name of toleration we should avoid or suspend truth. They did not even allow that there could be several truths of equal validity and that therefore no truth could enjoy superiority. Locke believed that his religion was the true one. Voltaire saw nothing reprehensible in the fact that some religions were dominant in certain societies, and that those who belonged to these religions were given leading political positions. He thought it natural that certain government functions were thus not accessible to some people because of their religious beliefs. By modern standards this does not seem a particularly libertarian position, but it is reconcilable with the general idea of toleration. Hierarchy and intolerance are two different things. The aim of toleration is not to be a substitute for equality, justice, and other moral and political qualities. Toleration cannot make any positive claims such as that a certain category of persons should be given certain political or social positions, specifically on the grounds of toleration.

From the beginning, however, it was obvious that the advocates of toleration were tempted to transcend the narrow limits of the negative version. The temptation was to make it more committed in the struggle for a better world, more partisan, more positive. The decisive step toward a positive interpretation was to neutralize certain points of view and to promote others; to oppose those philosophies, religions, and social norms which are coercive, dominating, authoritarian, monolithic; and to support other philosophies, religions, and social norms that do not have these unpleasant characteristics. Thus, toleration would no longer be blind, uncommitted, indifferent to the final result of the dispute between contending parties. On the contrary, it would be a major actor in the dispute, strengthening one party and withdrawing its support from the other. It would consist not in refraining from doing certain things, but in acting in a certain way, in choosing and committing oneself to the cause of freedom. By being passive, by not choosing and committing oneself, one ran the risk of becoming an unwitting accomplice to the intolerant party.

The history of the last two hundred years of Western political philosophy may be interpreted, among other things, as a gradual decline of negative toleration and a simultaneous growth of its positive counterpart. Most of these efforts have aimed at no less than the discovery of the final key to the tolerant world, that is, the creation of a framework of ethical guidelines which effectively prevent intolerance. To put it yet differently, there has been the hope that the forces of toleration could finally achieve victory in the war against the forces of intolerance, or – even if reality proves resistant – that at least we will have a clear formula of the strategy and the general goal. This tradition extends from John Stuart Mill – who located the source of oppression in the customs and social stereotypes

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which, understandably, made him attribute a special role to eccentrics constantly undermining our thoughtless sense of stability – to Herbert Marcuse – who came to a somewhat baffling conclusion in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* that "liberating tolerance" meant "intolerance against movements from the Right, and toleration of movements from the Left."

During the last decade or so, another solution of how to make the world safe for toleration has come from a group of thinkers who like to label themselves as postmodern. In spite of important differences among them, they seem to share a conviction that we can, we should, and we have already begun to liquidate the intellectual basis of intolerance. Negative tolerance was defective because – it is maintained – with respect to truth it preached only humility. It is truth as such, regardless of the degree of arrogance or humility with which it is professed, that is responsible for intolerance. Whatever we regard as true, be it in philosophy, morals, ways of life, criteria of permissiveness, is always exclusive. It inevitably relegates some people outside the sphere of what is normal and respectable. For example, by stressing one's heterosexuality one may be suspected of implying that there is something objectively wrong with homosexuality, which in turn makes one susceptible to the charge of depriving homosexuals of their dignity and consequently of inciting discrimination against them.

From truth to persecution there is then a straight and logical transition. Hence the obvious implication is that in order to secure toleration we must abandon the traditional criteria of evaluation, and in more ambitious projects, we must abandon traditional metaphysics and the epistemology from which the criterion of truth derived its strength. We must eradicate once and for all the sense of philosophical certainty that permitted some to look down on others, a sense of certainty stemming from the assumption that our world has an essence or foundation reachable by the cognitive faculties of the wise, who then impose it on the ignorant. Once we annihilate the assumption of philosophical essentialism and foundationalism, the sting of intolerance will be cut off.

Truth, wrote Michel Foucault in *Power/Knowledge*, is not something to be discovered but rather "a regime": "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true." For the old followers of the truth-as-regime theory, for Marx, Lenin, and their disciples, the power-holders were explicit: the bourgeoisie, capitalists, the industrial-military complex. For the following generations of the philosophers of suspicion – for post-structuralists, postmodernists, deconstructionists – the enemy who holds truth through power is more obscure. We usually see only the effects, not the perpetrators: a frame of mind, a system of concepts, a philosophy. This power has

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become thus even less visible than a dictatorship of customs and opinion, so feared by nineteenth-century liberals, and more harmful to the human mind. For Derrida it would be "phallogocentrism," a domination of human consciousness and behavior by male rationalism. The cause of toleration has been given a new target, more deeply hidden than previous ones. Where once it was the Catholic Church, then political authoritarianism, then customs and prevailing opinion, now it is philosophy, language, intellectual education.

This program of liberation amounts to a virtual abolition of philosophy in the form in which it has existed for two and a half millenia. Along with the concept of truth, other basic notions and distinctions have been divested of their philosophical legitimacy and come to be viewed as the potential carriers of oppression: essence, nature, subject-object dichotomy, reason, good, evil. Until recently conceived of as "strong thinking," philosophy must be replaced by something far less demanding, less authoritarian and patronizing, in short, by "weak thinking" characterized by Gianni Vattimo as *il pensiero debole*. What will it be like? Some call up the ancient quarrel between rhetoric, championed by the sophists, and philosophy, whose greatest defenders were Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. They argue that we are witnessing today the decline of strong philosophy, inhumanely objective and hierarchical, and the triumph of essentially weak rhetoric: the criteria of social coexistence, adaptable and malleable, have begun to play a more important role than the suprahuman criteria of truth. As Richard Rorty put it, democracy has become prior to philosophy.

What philosophers once interpreted as a disinterested pursuit of truth has now been replaced by social praxis; by dialogue and communication; by deconstruction and hermeneutics; by play and spontaneous expression; by individual or collective therapy. The abolition of philosophy has to lead to the abolition of the distinction between the center and the periphery. In the new world there are no peripheries, or – what amounts to the same thing – there are nothing but peripheries. Some enthusiasts of "weak thinking," like G. B. Madison, do not hesitate to speak of the new era in human relations:

> The politics of postmodernity, like postmodern philosophy itself, will . . . no longer be one of opposites. Oppositional thinking goes along with metaphysical hierarchies, and it is precisely these which are being undermined by the new postmodern, global civilization now coming into being. The new era has the potential of being one not of metaphysical, essence-bound homogeneity and modernistic uniformity but of difference, particularity, plurality, and heterogeneity. In regard, for instance, to the new geo-economic order, we are witnessing the

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> emergence of a complex, interlocking, and decentered network of institutions in which there is no longer any identifiable source, origin, or centre.

Those who live in such a world will no longer be troubled by the metaphysical horror or the specter of nothingness; on the contrary, a sense of Kundera's "lightness of being" will produce in them what Rorty has called "the air of light-minded aestheticism," an attitude which the American philosopher has openly welcomed and approved:

> The encouragement of light-mindedness about traditional philosophical topics serves the same purposes as does the encouragement of light-mindedness about traditional theological topics. Like the rise of large market economies, the increase in literacy, the proliferation of artistic genres, and the insouciant pluralism of contemporary culture, such philosophical superficiality and light-mindedness helps along the disenchantment of the world. It helps make the world's inhabitants more pragmatic, more tolerant, more liberal, more receptive to the appeal of instrumental rationality.

On a popular level, this frame of mind, as well as the hope attached to it, is illustrated by the kind of postmodernist fiction which in many cases is built on one symptomatic pattern: the protagonist (and with him the reader) is forced by circumstances or by manipulation to repeatedly reorganize his interpretation of reality and to pass through heuristic trials which reveal to him the arbitrariness of his former philosophical self-assured seriousness.

A somewhat different version of positive toleration expresses itself in an attitude rendered by one Polish author as "sympathetic openness." Since, as Goethe put it, "to tolerate is to offend," we cannot, following his indication, confine ourselves to negative toleration which others might find patronizing and humiliating. To the modern liberal British philosopher R. M. Haire, man acknowledges the ideal of toleration if he acknowledges "a readiness to respect other people's ideals as if they were his own."

Those who champion this form of toleration do not maintain – and such possible misunderstanding must be made clear – that sympathetic openness should prevail only in the initial stages of contacts with unknown individuals, groups, and opinions. It thus excludes the possibility of being sympathetically open to something as yet unknown, of then encountering it, finding it repulsive, and ultimately deciding to treat it neither with sympathy nor with openness. Rather, sympathetic openness

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must be present at all stages of contact with other people's opinions and ideals. Hare argues for the plausibility of his thesis and tells us how expansive the limits of liberals' respect for other points of view ought to be:

> It is part of the liberal's ideal that a good society, whatever else it is, is one in which the ideals and interests of all are given equal consideration. It is, to use Kantian language, a kingdom of ends in which all are, at least potentially, legislating members. . . . He may even think that a diversity of ideals is in itself a good thing . . . because it takes all sorts to make a world. If the liberal's ideal is of any of these kinds, he is not betraying it but following it if he tolerates other people's pursuit of their ideals, provided that, where the pursuit of one ideal hinders the pursuit of another, there shall be . . . a just distribution of advantages and disadvantages. It is only the last proviso which prevents the liberal from allowing even the fanatic to pursue his ideals without impediment; but the liberal is not required by his own ideal to tolerate intolerance."

In practice, it might be difficult to be sympathetically open to all points of view. This, however, does not discredit the sympathetic attitude itself, since what matters here is not infinite sympathy to an infinite number of opinions but a certain disposition which reveals itself in contacts with new phenomena and consists in encouraging and welcoming diversity in human life. On the other hand, sympathetic openness modifies our definition of "the fanatic." In this view, the fanatic is transformed. The fanatic is no longer a person with excessive, religious or quasi-religious, and usually mistaken enthusiasm for a certain system of beliefs. Since the sympathetically open person is self-defined as one who approves and works for diversity, then by contrast, the fanatic is someone who acts and speaks against diversity as an organizing principle, someone who does not necessarily hold one set of opinions and launch a crusade to impose it on others but who opposes egalitarian diversity in principle and who chooses some form of hierarchy in social life as a necessity.

Because both tolerance and fanaticism reveal themselves, in real life, as tendencies and dispositions (the first for milder and the second for stricter criteria of selection of acceptable societal ideals), it is reasoned that all those who cherish the value of diversity must perceive those even merely considering the subjection of the purality of ideals to selection and hierarchical organization to be intolerant. According to such reasoning, one does not have to try very hard to be vulnerable to the charge of intolerance to diversity. Thus, the growth of the pluralistic order is likely to increase the number of suspicions of fanaticism. The more diverse the world, the greater the probability that any statement, act, thought, or idea

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will be regarded as a expression of the intention to exclude, patronize, limit, subject, discriminate.

The pluralistic liberal who is enchanted with diversity, despite repeated declarations that the pluralistic world serves the cause of truth better than any other system, paradoxically has no difficulty in accepting the assumption shared by Marx, Lenin, Foucault, and many others: truth is primarily a partisan weapon; it is power or a regime rather than a theoretical concept. Therefore dispersing truth is a matter as urgent as dispersing power. In their struggle against the concentration of truth, pluralist liberals argue that analogous to the plurality of the centers of power there are just as many possible versions of truth. Their argument is undoubtedly ingenious, and it serves the same purpose as the postmodern assault on the concept of the center itself. The ultimate aim of those who resort to this argument is not to facilitate the exchange of ideas in order to have a better and truer understanding of the world but, in their view, to prevent the emergence of any dominant truth-power structure, to fight fanaticism.

Contemporary toleration has ceased to be what it once was – a practical skill that enabled people to live together – and has become a complex theoretical issue. Just as negative toleration was in theory and practice insolubly linked with several human virtues and vices, so positive toleration seems closely connected with several political ideals – justice, diversity, equality, liberty, fraternity. Yet this latter association is a most dubious one. It is relatively easy to demonstrate that negative toleration can humanize political order, but it is a much greater challenge to posit a complex theory of a superior political system built on the idea of positive toleration. Since it is agreed that negative toleration has indeed humanized political order, then it must also be agreed that it is possible to settle essential questions and differences about political order and philosophy irrespective of the problem of positive toleration (although toleration, naturally, may add to the value of particular solutions). Yet in the face of such evidence, efforts to connect positive toleration with actual political ideals continue to imply that the concept of positive toleration itself contains a comprehensive set of fundamental philosophical assertions.

There would be nothing obviously wrong in maintaining a political philosophy serving the cause of toleration, were it not that it involves a deception. If we fail to keep in mind the distinction between negative and positive toleration, we may easily be misled into believing that both make the same demands of us. The deception lies in the assertion that a political philosophy of toleration or, more precisely, *the ideology of toleration,* conveys nothing more than a minimal requirement. Its supporters want to persuade us that only a minor concession related to an outer form of behavior – as negative toleration is – is necessary: we should be civilized,

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compassionate, open, flexible, well-mannered. In fact, their requirement is maximalist, and the expected concessions are anything but minor. It is no trifle that, as postmodernism teaches, we are to renounce basic philosophical categories and to throw traditional belief in the essential meaningfulness of the world into the dustbin of history. It is no trifle that, as pluralist libertarians insist, we are forbidden to discriminate between different ideals and that in case of their conflict we must distribute them equally.

The deception is that the advocates of positive toleration make sweeping philosophical statements while at the same time refuse to admit they are making them. Postmodernism, for example, blurs the distinction, to use Rorty's phrase, between, democracy and philosophy. One does not know whether the postmodernists propound a highly controversial philosophical thesis that objective truth does not exist, or whether they are arguing that toleration and pluralism require that there *be* no objective truth. In the first case, the thesis cannot be proven, since the criterion of truth on which such a proof could be built has been destroyed. In the second case, the argument becomes irrelevant because toleration is a form of behavior, not a philosophical hypothesis favoring one model of metaphysics rather than another. Uneasiness about the antimetaphysical revolution is countered with the assertion of the world's pluralistic nature. Any defense of some form of hierarchy in social life is met with the idea of a centerless metaphysics.

The essential trouble with positive toleration (especially in its "sympathetic openness" version) is that it attempts to combine two attitudes which are extremely difficult to reconcile. First, it implies that one can have one's own point of view; second, that one must accept a world of diversity where all points of view are equal (except those that are "fanatical"). Logically, such a combination leads to insoluble conflicts. The possession of a point of view presupposes a certain hierarchy; certain ideas and attitudes have been found right and deserving of sympathy; others found to be tolerable; still others to be wrong, dangerous and repulsive. The supporters of sympathetic openness imply that one is not entitled to such hierarchies. The absence of effective hierarchies implies that one is forbidden to do two things. First, one is virtually prohibited to make any negative judgments about other points of view because such negative evaluations could be considered discriminatory. (In the case of negative toleration, certain critical evaluations were also discouraged or prevented but for different reasons: out of hypocrisy, humility, good manners, intellectual honesty, and so on.) One is forced to respect something which, contrary to his deepest convictions, he finds distasteful. One is also prohibited strong self-identification. To be true to the demands of

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sympathetic openness or postmodern anti-foundationalism, one should not identify oneself without simultaneously adding a list of qualifications to dispel any suspicion of harboring an exclusive or closed character. For instance, a truly tolerant Christian would be bound to affirm: "Yes, I am Christian, but I am nevertheless sympathetically open to an artist who puts the Crucifix in urine."

Can we – one must ask – live with those two prohibitions? I think the answer is, "No." One cannot be, for example, a Catholic and not feel outrage at a view of the Crucifix in urine. I see, however, one possible way for both prohibitions to be accepted. One would have to develop a certain frame of mind, or even a certain worldview, detached from any traditional hierarchical points of view such as Judaism, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, nationalism, conservatism, socialism, and so on. To put it briefly, one would have to become a *homo liberalis,* whose first and foremost loyalty in public as well as in private is to the order of diversity, not to any one particular creed; someone who strongly believes in the equality of cultures, moralities, ideals, usually because he feels they are authentic expressions of human existence; someone who compensates for the lack of hierarchy (that is, egalitarianism) by resolutely and vehemently opposing all forms of hierarchical outlooks, defined as "fanaticism"; someone who compensates for the indefiniteness of his creed by espousing different causes at different times (those that are currently fashionable, as his adversaries would not hesitate to remark). One day he will defend AIDS victims; another day he will speak against the oppression of women in Muslim countries; another day he will sign a petition against the anti-abortion law in Ireland.

Homo liberalis constitutes a distinct conception of humanness, and as with every such conception, good and bad things can be said about it. Whether it is preferable to other conceptions of the human person is here beside the point. What is important is that *homo liberalis* is the only embodiment of humanity that can satisfy the requirements of and conditions for toleration (understood as sympathetic openness), as the particular conception of man advocated by the postmodern version. This is the major and, I would say, irredeemable weakness of sympathetic openness and postmodernism. The principle merit of toleration in the original sense was that a Protestant was not compelled to renounce his Protestantism, and a Jew was not compelled to renounce his Jewishness. It appears now that to earn the honor of being counted among the tolerant we must all become *homines liberales* and substantially transform our worldviews. Moreover, we must do so not because those worldviews have been proven false but because they are believed to be socially and politically offensive. In short, toleration entails a program of profound social re-education. Of course,

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such a program may be a good thing in itself or may lead to beneficial results, but why call it toleration? A society which consists of *homines liberales* may be more tolerant than any of the actually existing societies. This does not mean, however, that it is better than those societies; or that it in the end is worth pursuing at all cost; or that the means which lead to such an end are those of tolerance.

Positive tolerationists ignore the role of strong identities and of strong thought in the functioning of social order. Like Mill, they think that stable identities and stable thought are enemies of freedom. Sometimes – it would be hard to deny – they undoubtedly are. On the other hand, however, they give us a sense of security and self-assuredness which are necessary ingredients of responsible and predictable social behavior. There is certainly some correlation between self-confidence, deriving from an awareness of the opportunity to rely on norms believed to be stable and valid, and civility, with which one may approach other points of view. Similarly, rootlessness, instability, and identity crises often jeopardize the harmony of political coexistence of groups and individuals. The most dangerous form of nationalism, for example, xenophobic and intolerant (in the original sense), is the one that feeds itself on self-doubt and confusion. For this reason, well-integrated communities, just as well-integrated individuals, are better partners of coexistence than those whose sense of integration has been weakened. Temporary stability founded on such weakness may very well collapse under the pressure of untamed longings, first thwarted and then reborn, for distinct collective identities and for strong philosophies that would give them a relatively durable legitimacy.

Strong identities and strong thought should not be put in radical opposition to toleration for another reason. The category of toleration was conceived precisely for handling the problems that arise out of the clash of strong identities and strong *Weltanschauungen*. Toleration was not a solution to these problems but a way of life where no such solution – on a theoretical as well as on a structural level – seemed at hand. With the abolition of strong identities and strong thought toleration ceases to be necessary, because it is asserted that the original problem it was proposed to cope with no longer exists. If we agree with such enthusiasts of the postmodern weakening such as Zygmut Bauman, who claims that in our times "the universal existential mode" is "the experience of estrangement" and that rootlessness and strangeness have become universal to the point of dissolution ("if everyone is a stranger, no one is"), then the question of toleration becomes immaterial. What can intolerance consist of, if we are all not only rootless, homeless, estranged but also satisfied with our new existential condition, having lost the illusions of traditional metaphysics? Where in the new world of thin, provisional, easily changeable

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and pluralistic identities would it be possible to find a source of discrimination?

Here we are once again confronted with the paradox: in a world constructed so that there should be less and less intolerance, the obsession with its danger increases. The postmodernists and the pluralists, as one might suspect, have not called off their crusade for toleration, nor are they willing to modify its maximalist ambitions. No less than their predecessors, convinced of the imminence of the new era of ultimate toleration, they perceive the danger that supposedly comes from those who do not share their belief in weak identities and weak thought. It would, however, never occur to them that those enemies of the new civilization – "neofascisms" and "new archaisms," as G. B. Madison called them, still exist. Fortunately the real world continues to frustrate, as it has so often in the past, the expectations of enlightened minds. Obviously we do not know what will be, if there is such a thing, the final outcome. Perhaps those enemies – absolutists, foundationalists, essentialists, traditionalists, monists – will lose the battle and be heard from no longer. Perhaps they will become a tiny minority in a world of universal rootlessness and ever increasing diversity and perform the role of eccentrics, which the old liberals thought would be perennially performed by anticonservatives. Perhaps their importance will grow. Perhaps the postmodernists and the pluralists tend to be somewhat hysterical about fanaticism precisely because they have never really believed that their ideal of openness and centerlessness will materialize.

No matter what happens, one thing seems unquestionable. With the continuing struggle for positive toleration in our ways of thinking, of writing, of teaching, of transmitting knowledge, of using certain words and avoiding others; with the continuing emphasis on disenchanted rootlessness and diversity as the metaphysical (or rather anti-metaphysical) safeguard of toleration; with the continuing suspicion and fear of partisanship in philosophy and knowledge in general, it may very well be that the world will indeed become more tolerant. At the same time, the things that will be said or allowed to be said about the world will be less and less interesting.

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STEVE DOWDEN

Thomas Bernhard's Austria

Among Austrian writers, no one has been more preoccupied with the myths of Austrian national history and identity than Thomas Bernhard. Bernhard was famously hostile to Austria, which he denounced frequently and vociferously as "the most menacing of all European states"; Vienna is no more than a "sewer of mind and culture"; and he described Salzburg, his native city, as having been deformed by the malign spirits of Catholicism and National Socialism. In the following passage from his novel *Old Masters,* the serio-comic tone of his animadversions are apparent. The protagonist – an eighty-two year-old curmudgeon named Reger – warms up to a long tirade against the Prater, longstanding symbol of Vienna and Austria (perhaps best known to Americans from Harry Lime's ferris-wheel ride with Holly Martins in *The Third Man*):

> The Prater today is no longer the turbulent amusement park of my childhood: the Prater today is a repulsive collection of vulgarians, a collection of criminal types. The whole Prater reeks of beer and crime and we encounter in it nothing but the brutality and the brazen feeble-mindedness of the mean-spirited, snotty Viennese. Not a day passes without a murder in the Prater being reported in the papers, daily at least one, usually several, rapes in the Prater. In my childhood a day at the Prater was always a joyous occasion, and in the spring the scent of lilac and chestnuts really did hang in the air. Today proletarian perversity stinks to high heaven. The Prater, this most charming of all inventions for bringing pleasure, said Reger, is now no more than a universal fairground of vulgarity. Yes, if the Prater were still as it was in my childhood, said Reger, I would go there with the Irrsigler family, but as matters stand I do not go there, I cannot afford to; if I went to the Prater with the Irrsigler family I would be a wreck for weeks to come. My mother used to be driven to the Prater with her parents in a horse-drawn carriage, she would run along the Prater Avenue in a floating silk dress. These images are history, said Reger, all that is long past. Today you are lucky if you are not shot in the back in the Prater, Reger said, or stabbed through the heart, or at the least have your wallet snatched right from your jacket pocket. The present age is an utterly brutalized age.

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Decline is Bernhard's pervasive theme, and Austrian decline in particular. Sometimes it is obliquely expressed in attacks on symbolic institutions, as in the above example, and sometimes he attacks directly. Bernhard did not hesitate to turn his verbal wrath against the government, its officials, or various other Austrian dignitaries and celebrities. Libel suits were a part of his daily life. He was an unrelenting critic of a homeland that he showed no interest in improving. In marked contrast to his German counterparts, Bernhard was not an advocate of reform. Writers along the order of Günter Grass or Christa Wolf, to name but two champions of progress through reasoned critique, make large social and political claims for fiction and drama. They are genuine reformers, "Weltverbesserer," a species of writer with whom Bernhard felt no particular solidarity. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that Thomas Bernhard's fiction is probing, revealing, and fundamentally right-headed in its attitude toward Austria and the Austrians. But he must be understood as a satirist in the tradition of Jonathan Swift, who likewise felt little sympathy for his own countrymen. The two writers share a deeply held, uncompromisingly moralistic approach to fiction. In Bernhard's case it can be demonstrated most easily in his last major piece of fiction, yet to appear in English translation, *Auslöschung* (*Obliteration*), published in 1986.

Auslöschung pulls together and makes explicit themes merely symbolic in other books. It is characteristic for Bernhard to symbolize Austria as the family of the chief protagonist. In *Auslöschung* the family is that of Franz-Josef Murau, an expatriate Austrian bachelor living in Rome. The Murau clan resides on its ancient estate, Wolfsegg, which since the end of the monarchy, but especially since the end of the Second World War, has been falling into decay. The principle agent of its decline, according to Franz-Josef, is his mother. The awful mother is another of Bernhard's stock figures. In *Frost* she is the slovenly landlady; in *Correction* she is the low-minded and brutal daughter of the village butcher, mother of the protagonist Roithamer; in *Auslöschung* she is a similarly dim-witted, grasping female responsible for tainting the bloodline of the family with her despicable character traits. Bernhard links her directly to the Nazis – she was a sympathizer during and after the war, though mainly she is an opportunist who will sway with the powers that be. By portraying her as a reactionary who never left Nazi thought behind her, Bernhard retrospectively clarifies the significance of a whole series of similar characters. The "tainted bloodline" metaphor recurs frequently in Bernhard's fiction and drama. It is often linked to incest, as in *The Lime Works* and *The Eve of Retirement*. Its significance is plain: the Nazi era, Austria's unwholesome union with Hitler's Germany, has meant the degradation and even oblit-

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eration of Austria – thus the title "Auslöschung." Bernhard offers no possibility of redemption from the fallen state of the Austrian soul.

This sounds at least a little like the pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer, one of the philosophers whom Bernhard mentions from time to time. Schopenhauer speaks of existence as the original sin from which no redemption is possible. Yet Bernhard's debt to Schopenhauer and other philosophers has been exaggerated. Bernhard's pessimism is at bottom anchored in historical experience – his own and Austria's – not in ontological philosophy. The "original sin" of Bernhard's Austria is not its existence, but its morally blighted history. Metaphors that have generally been understood to be grounded in an arbitrary Bernhardian ontology are really anchored in his experience and vision of history, especially his preoccupation with disease and deformity.

Disease is above all a metaphor for the course of Austrian history since World War Two: in *Amras,* two brothers are subject to a genetically inherited form of epilepsy. *Gargoyles* and *Frost* give us the land of Styria, a hellish landscape of every imaginable social disease and congenital defect. Even in his memoirs, it is plain that Bernhard's own tuberculosis runs a course that is parallel to the moral state of postwar Austria as a whole. He portrays himself and his family as the innocent victims of a morally bankrupt state. He owes his disease to the state doctors who bungled his case and to the state institutions – managed by former Nazis, as he makes clear – in which he was treated. And his recovery is only apparent: he never heals; instead he only just manages to suppress the worst symptoms. Eventually the disease would destroy him, as he knew, and it did so in 1989.

It is a short step from the idea of a family whose bloodline has been tainted by moral depravity to the idea of hereditary disease as a symbol for the ruined state of Austria's national identity. Not every family member is directly debilitated. In *Amras,* one brother succumbs and the other doesn't; in *Frost* and *Gargoyles* the narrator does not succumb to the main protagonist's contagious insanity; in *Correction,* Roithamer and his favorite sister seem untouched by traits from the mother's side of the family. Still, no one escapes the juggernaut of Austrian moral guilt in Bernhard's universe. It crushes and maims all Austrians, the guilty generation of the parents and the relatively innocent generation of their children.

In *Auslöschung* Franz-Josef Murau tries to escape his family and its history by moving to Italy. By changing countries and languages he hopes to eradicate or at least minimize his Austrianness. But to be born Austrian is a curse from which there is no release. He must return to Austria when his parents and older brother are killed in an automobile accident. During the funeral, old Nazis, some even in uniform, come pouring out of the

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woodwork. Now as the sole living male heir of the family and its ruined traditions, it is his duty to carry on, but he refuses – or so we must assume. He dies an unspecified death and thereby puts an absolute end to an identity that in his eyes had been murdered by the moral corruption of his parents, a corruption that is his, too, simply because he is their child.

Questions of identity also predominate in Bernhard's final play, *Heldenplatz* (which Kurt Waldheim denounced as a "vulgar insult to the Austrian people"). He wrote it for the Burgtheater's 1988 centennial, which was of course exactly fifty years after Hitler's march into Austria and his triumphant speech before jubilating masses of Austrians at Vienna's Heldenplatz. That Bernhard should have composed a play merely celebrating the Burgtheater, a symbol of Austria's supposedly unbroken cultural identity, was out of the question. Bernhard – a writer, by the way, who had also been dismissed by the left as an apolitical and introverted representative of the so-called "neue Innerlichkeit" ("new subjectivity") – chose instead to submit a much more difficult question to the Austrian intelligentsia. More than any other Austrian writer, Bernhard has attempted to confront the question of history's meaning for Austrian identity. *Heldenplatz* presents the family of a Jewish philosopher, a refugee of 1938 who has spent his life up to 1988 teaching at Oxford. Professor Josef Schuster has returned with his wife to Vienna, at the invitation of the city, to live and work there. Once in Vienna, he finds he cannot survive there and so commits suicide. Schuster's dilemma is this: as an Austrian he felt isolated in England; as a Jew he felt isolated in Austria. Which is his true identity: Is he an Austrian or a Jew? The double-bind drives him to suicide, which should be understood as Bernhard's way of forcing a question on the Austrian public. He wanted to make it clear that contemporary Austria has chosen to repress and reject a large part of its heritage, represented in *Heldenplatz* by the Austrian philosopher who also happened to be a Jew (and in whom we can recognize traits borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jean Améry). The obliteration of Schuster's identity means the obliteration of Austria's.

Bernhard's tirades against Austria have been taken both too seriously and not seriously enough: too seriously when taken literally; not seriously enough when dismissed as the ravings of a self-promoting hack writer or as the eccentrically subjective critique of a loner. What we have in Bernhard is an Austrian national satirist, whose contribution to national self-consciousness and self-examination is second to none. Presumably he took seriously the idea that modern history has obliterated Austria's former, that is, true identity, but the effect of his writing has been to sharpen the question of Austrian identity, not to eliminate it.

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Poems

HORACE

Ode III.13 *To a Fountain*

O thou Bandusian fountain, clearer than crystal is clear,
To whom it is fitting to bring libations of wine

And offerings also of flowers, tomorrow the chosen
First-born of the flock, his brow budding

With new little horns foretelling warfare and love,
Will be brought to honor the clearness of your waters.

In vain. The blood of this child of the carefree flock
Will stain with its color of red your clear cold waters.

The cruel heat of August can find no way
To penetrate the glade to where you are;

Gladly your shady coolness welcomes the oxen
That come here, weary of ploughing, and welcomes as well

The wandering pasturing flock that finds your waters.
You shall be famous among the famous fountains

Because of my song that praises the ilex tree
Leaning above the rocks the babbling waters leap from.

Ode I. 23 *To Chloë*

Chloë, it is as if
        You were but a little fawn
Needlessly fearful of every
        Smallest breeze that stirs,
Ready to run as far
        Away as it possibly can,
Seeking its timid mother
        Anywhere but here

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Where its heart beats fast and it trembles
In every limb for every
Motion of light or leaf,
Signs of the spring beginning,
Or if a lizard's foot
Disturbs a fallen twig.
Chloë, I am neither
A lion nor a tiger;
I have no wish to hurt you;
Do not run to your mother;
Now is the time for love.

Translated from the Latin by David Ferry

GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE

An Evening

An eagle stooped from archangelic sky
Sustain me
How long will you allow these lamps to shiver
Pray for me pray for me

The city is metallic the only star
Embedded in your eyes
When trolleys rolled they shot pale fires
Onto mangy magpies

And all that shivered in your eyes was dreamed
And drunk by one man only
In the gaslight sandy-haired as syringa
Your sleeves coiled into me

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The actor shows his tongue to heedful women
A ghost is a suicide
The drooling apostle hangs from a fig tree
Love is riding on the dice

Bells of distinctive music marked your birth
Behold
The roads are flowering and palm trees advancing
To you

Sickly Autumn

Afflicted autumn and adored
You die when hurricanes batter the roses
And the orchards
Fill with snow

Poor autumn
Perish in whiteness and in wealth
Snowfall and mellow fruit
As in the deepest sky
Hawks glide
Over naiads and over the dwarves
Who never loved

In distant woodlands
Rutting deer have roared

How much I love o season your clamor
The apples falling to the earth
The wind and forest weeping
Their tears in autumn leaf by leaf
The leaves
Trampled
A train
Passing
Life
Disposed of

Translated from the French by Donald Revell

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JORGE LUIS BORGES

The Engraving

Why, as I turn the housekey in the lock,
Do I see again with the old astonishment
In my mind's eye the engraving of a Tartar
Roping from horseback the grey wolf of the steppes?
The animal strains against the rope forever.
The horseman gazes at it. Memory
Restores to me this picture from a book
Whose language and whose color I don't recall.
It has been many years since I last saw it.
Sometimes memory really frightens me.
In its vast palaces and winding grottos
(Said Augustine) there are so many things.
Above all, hell and paradise are there.
To summon hell, whatever may contain
Your slightest and most ordinary day
Or any of your nightmares, is enough;
To summon paradise, the love of lovers,
Freshness of water in the thirsty throat,
Reason and the exercise of reason,
The high gloss of unchanging ebony,
And O, – both moon and shade – the gold of Virgil.

Museum

Quatrain

Others have died but that took place in the past,
the season, as everyone knows, most perfectly suited
for death.
How can it be that I, a subject of Yaqub Amansur,
will die as roses and Aristotles had to die?

from *Diván de Almotásin el Magrebí* (12th Century)

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Limits

There's a line of Verlaine's I will not remember again.
There's a street nearby forbidden to my footsteps.
There is a mirror that has seen my face for the last time.
There is a door I have closed for good till world's end.
Among the books on my shelves (I am looking at them)
There must be one I shall never open again.
This summer I shall be 50;
Death is wearing me down, without pause.

from *Inscripciones* by Julio Platero Haedo (Montevideo, 1923)

The Poet Testifies to His Fame

The dome of heaven is the measure of my glory,
The libraries of the East argue over my verses,
Emirs seek me out to fill my mouth with gold,
The angels already have my newest ghazal by heart.
The tools of my trade are humiliation and anguish;
Would to God that I had died at birth.

from *Diván de Albucásim el Hadramí* (12th century)

Translated from the Spanish by Robert Mezey

ELIZABETH SPIRES

The First Day

The ward is quiet, the mothers delivered,
except in one a woman labors still and calls,
with a sharp cry, that she is dying.
She is not dying but cannot know it now.
Trapped in the birthstorm, I did not cry,
but saw my body as the enemy
I could not accommodate, could not deny.
Morning arrived, and my daughter.

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That's how it is in this world, birth, death,
matter-of-fact, happening like that.
The room was warm. The room was full of flowers,
her face all petals and leaves, a flower
resembling such as I had never seen.
All day she slept beside me, eyes darting
beneath bruised blue eyelids, retracing the journey,
dreaming the birth dream over and over
until it held no fear for her.
I dared not wake her. The hours passed.
I rested as her soul poured in her body,
the way clear water, poured from a height,
takes the shape of a flaring vase or glass, or light
fills a room's corners on a brilliant winter morning.
Slowly, she opened her eyes, a second waking,
taking me by surprise, a bright being
peering out from behind dark eyes,
as if she already knew what sights would be seen,
what marvels lay ahead of her, weariness and woe,
the joists and beams, the underpinnings of the world
shifting a little to make room for her.
The first day was over forever. Tranced,
I picked up the pen, the paper, and wrote:
I have had a child. Now I must live with death.

WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA

Epitaph

Here lies, old-fashioned as parentheses,
the authoress of verse. Eternal rest
was granted her by earth, although the corpse
had failed to join the avant-garde, of course.
The plain grave? There's poetic justice in it,
this ditty-dirge, the owl, the meek cornflower.
Passerby, take your PC out, press "POWER,"
think on Szymborska's fate for half a minute.

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Poetry Reading

To be a boxer, or not to be there
at all. Oh Muse, where are *our* teeming crowds?
Twelve people in the room, eight seats to spare,
it's time to start this cultural affair.
Half came inside because it started raining,
the rest are relatives. Oh Muse.

The women here would love to rant and rave,
but that's for boxing. Here they must behave.
Dante's Inferno is ringside nowadays.
Likewise his Paradise. Oh Muse.

Oh, not to be a boxer but a poet,
one sentenced to hard shelleying for life,
for lack of muscles forced to show the world
the sonnet that may make the high school reading lists
with luck. Oh Muse,
oh bobtailed angel, Pegasus.

In the first row, a sweet old man's soft snore:
he dreams his wife's alive again. What's more,
she's making him that tart she used to bake.
Aflame, but carefully – don't burn his cake!–
we start to read. Oh Muse.

Translated from the Polish by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh

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CESAR VALLEJO

circa 1926

The three hundred womanly states of the Eiffel Tower are frozen. The Hertzian mane of culture on the tower, its down of sights, its vivid steelwork, bolted to a moral Cartesian system, are frozen.

The Bois de Boulogne, green from private clause, is frozen.

The Chamber of Deputies, where Briand exclaims: "I hereby call on all of the peoples of the earth. . .", and at whose doors the guard unconsciously caresses his cartridge of human restlessness, his simple manly bomb, his eternal Pascalian principle, is frozen.

The Champs Élysées, grey from public clause, is frozen

The statues that periplate the Place de Concord and above whose Phrygian caps one hears time studying to be infinite are frozen.

The dice of the Catholic Calvaries of Paris are frozen even on the face of the threes.

The civil cocks, astonished on the Gothic needles of Notre-Dame and Sacré-Coeur, are frozen.

The maiden of the Parisian countryside, whose thumb never repeats itself while measuring the range of her eyes, is frozen.

The bidirectional andante of Stravinsky's "The Firebird" is frozen.

Einstein's scribbling on the blackboard in the Richelieu amphitheater of the Sorbonne is frozen.

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The airplane tickets for the flight from Paris to Buenos Aries, in two hours, 23 minutes, 8 seconds, are frozen.

The sun is frozen.

The fire at the center of the earth is frozen.

The father, meridian, and the son, parallel, are frozen.

The two deviations of history are frozen.

My manly minor act is frozen.

My sexual oscillation is frozen.

Translated from the Spanish by Clayton Eshleman, with Jorge Guzmán

SUZANNE PAOLA

New Year's Eve

Seagulls in snow –
The new year comes
on white wings,

with incomprehensible cry –

Above the low palaver of the waves,
the gray sea gnawing its sugared shore.

Such consolations removed –
grandfather, child, home
buried or gone, though snow arcs
in a slow sift from the roof,
leaving us whole in a blotted landscape,
as if something would spare us for another year.

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Spruce woods drown in the bay's white metamorphosis –
And the dish of water
in the yard, where the dog slakes himself in spring –
When stars come, they catch in its shag of ice,
the great heaven caught in the small.

RICHARD FEIN

The Clouds

Land masses on the move, Balkan
cumuli. What was just Denmark. . .
elongating, warped into Italy.
Faces scallop, or notch and jut.
Mussolini's jaw and forehead bulk in
a race under his ovoid fascist hat.
And then from all the way down here
a cloud can sunder to a flower.
This run of heaven's uncertain, wanton,
even Ovidian – that mottled, deviant
moon squatting in the afternoon sky,
like some homeless buttock.
One cloud, whiter than a sheet
fresh from the washer-dryer,
shades into a pearl-gray tint,
like the handle of Patton's revolver.

J. S. VENIT

A Form of Telegram Cut from the Trees

Few paths return and then their burned fingers
make sense: the chisel tuning of the sentries
for noon to see so that time becomes another
voiceless occasion whose hymns include their

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zenith in their own descent. Winter is a large
man in a suit reading but I see your footprints
and your point although I understand so little
of what I see: the ritual of vision turned
into a vacant lot. Must I always think
about what to think? There are so many
versions of the same molten story each
inclined a little too indifferently to
help which is why you refuse the hook
to be followed by an instant of frozen
glory. At least you may observe and remember
so although unrecorded this remorse will not
be yours only. The monument worriedly burns
as it fills the veil of each new attraction:
civility as a form of telegram cut from
the trees, the chairs lined up in rows
of emotion now close enough to see.

TIMOTHY RICHARDSON

In the Tracks of a Stag

Though frost sets fires, disrobes these groves, entombs
the path as dreams, unmade,
swept in blustering spumes,
streak and fade,
you prance as on glass this rash of earth
with dehiscing sensitivities,
figure the prime of consciousness:
a trust unbroken in the ends of birth.
Dawn stabs you as you pass among trees.
Lodged in the chain of rhythm's press
(branches flashing antlers),
I slide toward all dust blurs.

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There is no tinge of blindness while this lithe
trance perfects my capture:
apprehension is lopped by a scythe
of awareness, rapture
bursts in my fingertips, being and care
dance off the moment everywhere—
Now, tangled sheets of sense catch largess
(your stillness), swell and sweep the furthest recess
as if time never left a dropping;
so bound by the electric catenas
from designless irises sopping
the stems of my retinas—

when I blink—stall. . . and fall to the bottom stair. . . .
One cannot stray in heaven's forehead of air
for long. The instant comes unstrung.
Yet, souls plot to slip life's *not,*
be rid of size,
take off its scent of flesh
as a mask, be free and fresh;
but, if they rise,
the trap of the mind sets off a thought,
sucks them down, wind and lung
and, as they wet it like autumnal rain,
it longs to know them *seem* to part again.

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KATHERINE JACKSON

Learning to Sketch Carmella's Garden

Sun, clearing the rooftop, whitens a soil-patch, builds geometries of shade
against the shingles while roses toss from a lattice, flaunt their difficult
hues. Pinks, greens. Greens are the hardest – those in the box, ready- made,
won't work for a leaf or stem – you mix them out of colors of earth, sea,
and sun. A spade, shoved in the loam (hastily, from the look of its tilt), glints
where digging has polished it. Someone could use it – and the pitch-fork,
near the edge, as of consciousness, of their picture. We learn to include,
include, nothing is sacred, all fair game for these rudimentary stabs,
pastel-thrusts, not of meaning, probably not of art, more likely of pleasure,
in the shape of facts so often overlooked. See! they blend, one into another:
sun into sky (Carmella is fetching a hat), leaves into soil, a great drenching
of photons pours these color-objects: bush, wall, path, back door,
cactus – spines and all – in a pot, once the eye meets, the hand or voice speaks
them, hand, voice, eye, mind, and yes, Old Sol, who crosses our path with
well-timed indifference, the casual spilling of ancient who knows in a garden
there is no fixed perspective. Thoughtless within our coronas of thought,
we rub and erase, ply and apply, rose madder, Naples yellow, phthalo blue,
anything but green: we are planting now, we are photosynthesis. In the hour's
meridian, we smudge our deliberate smudges, our own recognizable, ancestral
bodings, leaf-clumps we have carried within from the seed of our own
planting, figures for knowledge and the knowledge of knowledge, as the mind
twists upward and outward, away from itself, craving the sun, yet poised
with the earth's curve, seeing and scene, in the welter of green of its mixing.

JAMES LAUGHLIN

In Old Age

The pace of time changes
And is strangely bifurcated.
Day to day it races along,
Too fast for enjoyment.
The sled is careening down the hill
Toward the big oak where it will crash.
But at night, as I lie sleepless,
Time seems hardly to move.
Each scene that passes through my head
Is almost stationary,
Often lingering longer than I can bear.

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Along the Meadow Stream

The fluffy grasses on the edge
Of the stream hide my drifting line
And fly from the trout. Over the years
A deal of dreaming has drowned
In the limpid water. "Your mooning
Makes no knowledge," my grandfather
Used to tell me. "Let the fish be,
Get back to your books, lazy boy."
His voice has gone two lives away;
It stirs the water no longer along
The banks of the meadow stream.

STANLEY MOSS

Near Machpelah/Hebron

It was not a dream, a poet
led me down into the earth
where the sea in another age
had hollowed out a mountain.
He led me into a cave of marble cloud:
colossal backs, shoulders, thighs of reclining Gods.
Just above us a battle field four thousand years old,
some olive trees and wild flowers.
I can not believe these Gods need
more than an occasional lizard,
or the sacrifice of a dove that comes to them
through jags and crevices.
Madness to think the Gods
are invisible, in us, and worth fighting for
– if they want anything I suppose,
it is for the sea to come back again.

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SUSAN MIRON

Central and East European Fiction Chronicle

ON THE SKY'S CLAYEY BOTTOM. By Zdenek Urbánek. Translated by William Harkins. Four Walls, Eight Windows. $17.95.
TRUCK STOP RAINBOWS. By Iva Pekárková. Translated by David Powelstock. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $20.00.
THE LITTLE TOWN WHERE TIME STOOD STILL. By Bohumil Hrabal. Translated by James Naughton. Pantheon. $23.00.
COMPULSORY HAPPINESS. By Norman Manea. Translated from the French by Linda Coverdale. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $22.00.
THE PALACE OF DREAMS. By Ismail Kadare. Translated from the French by Barbara Bray. William Morrow. $19.00.
THE ISLAND. By Gustav Herling. Translated by Ronald Strom. Viking. $20.00.
ANNIHILATION. By Piotr Szewc. Translated by Ewa Hryniewicz-Yarbrough. Dalkey Archive Press. $16.95.
A MASS FOR ARRAS. By Andrej Szczypiorski. Translated by Richard Lourie. Grove Atlantic Inc. $18.95.

> Who will bear witness to these times? Who will record them? Certainly none of us: We've lived here too long, we've soaked the epoch up too well, we're too loyal to it to tell the truth about it. To tell the truth – at all.
>
> – Bronislaw Maj*

In Tolstoy's world, no two unhappy families are alike. The same might be said of modern Eastern European writers, each scarred differently from a similar juncture of historical time and geographic space. Yet most have been determined, despite the banning and censorship of their work, and at risk of imprisonment or exile, to "tell the truth" about their epoch as they knew it. "A heavy biography," as the exiled Romanian writer Norman Manea puts it, pithily describes many of their lives.

One soon realizes that little of the recent literature which has

*From *Polish Poets of the Last Two Decades of Communist Rule: Spoiling Cannibals' Fun*. Edited and translated by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh. Northwestern University Press. $29.95 cloth. $12.95 paper.

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emerged from behind the former Iron Curtain arrives here without a complicated publication history. Yet lacking a sleuth's wits, it's often difficult to find out much about these writers' histories and the draconian measures they took to insure their work would appear in print, even in a *samizdat* edition. It's puzzling, too, that although several of the books discussed here were bestsellers in Europe, the reputations they've achieved abroad have had a negligible effect on their cachet here. None has achieved the fame, captured the reading public's attention, or caused the commotion and notoriety that variously greeted them in their native lands or native languages.

Perhaps the most underappreciated Polish writer in exile (where some of the best Polish literature has been written) is Gustav Herling-Grudzinski. Never prolific, the stateless, ailing and publicity-shy Herling has published mostly in the Paris-based Polish monthly, *Kultura*. Two of Herling's acclaimed masterworks flicker in and out of print in America. *Diary Written by Night*, considered by many to be his greatest and quirkiest work, on a level of artistry and importance with Witold Gombrowicz's own *Diary*, is available only in Polish (*Dziennik Pisany Noca)* and French (*Journal Ecrit la Nuit*), although there are plans for its publication in America next year. And *A World Apart: The Journal of a Gulag Survivor* (published here in 1951 and in 1986) is once again lamentably out of print. In it, Herling, who was imprisoned in "the house of the dead" at the age of twenty, captured the essence of Stalin's gulag camps as Primo Levi did his internment in Auschwitz: he forgot nothing and rendered a first-person account so shattering that its message, scenes, and moments of both hope and terror are archetypal and unforgettable.

The spiritual torment and bedeviling isolation that plague Herling's imprisoned and ailing companions in *A World Apart* reappear in each of *The Island's* religious allegories. Although his work is saturated with history's mistakes and traumas, Herling's deepest sympathy lies with the solitary sufferer and the intricate workings of the human heart as it grapples with despair and the realization that "in a man's life only solitude can bring him absolute inward peace and restore individuality."

Initially published in Polish in France, in 1960 and 1963, the first two stories in *The Island* were originally jointly titled "The Wings of the Altar," while the third tale, "The Second Coming," takes its title from the Yeats poem. (Oddly, there is no mention in the recent edition that this is also *The Island*'s second coming in the English language; it was previously published here in 1967.) The title story begins in 1950 and, like a marioshka doll, opens up into another tale that leads us into an ancient time eerily resembling the present. The island, "a three-hour boat ride from Naples," served, we learn, during the Second World War as a shelter

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for Italian Jews, who "with sufficient funds, apprehension, and the gift of foresight settled in some of the more deserted parts of the island to wait out the storm. People talked very little and then in whispers of these unusual newcomers, as if they already knew that the Jews' fate would depend on silence. During these four years, when the world was covered with blood and tears and encompassed by fire and suffering, life on the island followed its usual course."

A 1903 letter sent by Franz Kafka to Oscar Pollack provides this story with a lengthy epigraph, laconically signaling Herling's abiding concern with the universality, if not inevitability, of human loneliness, and suffering:

> When you stand before me and look at me, what do you know of my sufferings and what do I know of yours? And if I fell at your feet and cried and told you, would you know any more about me than you know about hell when they say it is hot and sets one shivering? Therefore we men should stand before each other with as much awe, thoughtfulness, and love as before the gates of hell.

It's somewhat uncanny that both Herling and Andrej Szczypiorski, rarely thought of as linked – Herling has lived for thirty-five years in Naples, and was for decades banned in Poland, while Szczypiorski stayed behind, helping to found the Solidarity Congress of Polish Culture – have fixated in their books on the suffering of Jews, medieval plagues, and the monstrousness of history. Szczypiorski, best known for his novel *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman,* has set his political allegory, *A Mass for Arras,* in the Middle Ages, and based it on real historical events. (Setting one's tales in the distant past was a common strategy deployed by dissident writers before the fall of Communism to avoid trouble with the censors. Szczypiorski began *A Mass for Arras* in 1968). According to history, three years after a plague and famine killed one-fifth of the population of Arras's citizens as well as its crops and cattle, the townsfolk descended into an orgy of anti-Semitism and witch-hunts known today as the "Vauderie d'Arras."

It appears a scapegoat must always be found, and the Jews in Szczypiorski's books seem fated to live by this deadly rule. We watch Arras's paroxysm of madness and anarchy through the eyes of Jan, a Christian intellectual, an adoring pupil of the priest Albert, a proto-fascist demagogue who rules the town. After the plague breaks out, the gates to the town are "bolted fast from the outside and anyone planning to escape into the world made an easy target for the bishop's guards. The citizens . . felt their desolation and misfortune so keenly that they were disap-

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pointed in those whom they had trusted for so long a time." (Did these lines not hold any obvious resonance for Polish censors?) Believing they had "reached the lowest depths," Arras's citizens "concluded that God Himself was mocking them . . . With every passing day, God grew less needed for He was not present."

Three years later, when the owner of a dead horse accuses Tselus, a Jew, of putting a curse on his animal, bedlam erupts. To spite his tormentors, Tselus hangs himself in the town hall. Astonishingly, at first, "nearly every citizen admitted complicity in his death." Jan continues:

> Oh, I shall not attempt to prove here that they loved the Jews . . . or that it was without distaste that they rubbed shoulders with Jews on crowded market days, or that they trusted the word of a Jew. Every citizen understood that the Jews were an alien element and that God was sorely trying the townspeople by condemning them to live alongside the killers of Jesus Christ. But it was precisely because they were true Christians and submitted to the will of Heaven that their town became a soil in which the Jewish seed could grow.

When the town's Jews ask the town council for permission to bury Tselus, Itzak, the Jewish Elder who delivers the request, is promptly burned at the stake. Cannibalism and infanticide ensue, and the townspeople turn on each other and the Jews in a fit of denunciation and killing. Soon afterwards, Jan's other role model, David, Bishop of Utrecht, absolves the town of its guilt, but Jan himself is denounced and almost killed for the "crime" of insufficient loyalty.

Far more profound and unsettling than *The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman, A Mass for Arras* addresses – however elliptically – theological and philosophical issues every bit as significant as Szczypiorski's exploration of the mad workings of totalitarianism. What troubles his character Jan, and no doubt the author as well, is the ecclesiastical authorities' annulment of Arras's barbaric crimes. Should evil actions have no moral consequences? Who pays for crimes against humanity, and how, and for how long? When is the proper time to rebel against unquestioning acceptance of totalitarian authority? What is one entitled to do if one feels God is not, at that moment, watching, or caring? Jan's demoralization parallels that of the town of Arras, from which he flees, seeking refuge and exile in Bruge, something the remnants of Poland's Jewry were trying to do in 1968, just as this book was being written.

The Beautiful Mrs. Seidenman was one of the first of what has become an avalanche of Polish books to deal with the long-suppressed "Jewish question," a taboo topic during the years of Communism when ethnic

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differences were supposed to have disappeared under the benevolence of Socialist Internationalism. Indeed, after decades of silence about the fate of Jews as individuals and as a people, Polish writers nowadays include Jews in their fiction as a rite of passage, no doubt overcompensating for what Jaroslaw Anders has called "a black hole in Polish letters." Displaying a passionate empathy for Poland's murdered Jews has become the politically correct, even kosher, thing for a Polish writer to do, as reconfirmed most recently in Jaroslaw Rymkiewicz's novel *The Final Station: Umschlagplatz*, a dizzying patchwork of fact, time-travel, and postmodern fiction, including a deft Isaac Bashevis Singer imitation. Rymkiewicz's fictive stand-in acknowledges that both Jews and Poles will pounce on him because he is offering "Christian testimony" about "a Jewish topic" – Warsaw's *Umschlagplatz* (Debarkation Square), a "special realm of the spirit . . . a specific human destiny" from which three hundred and ten thousand Jews were deported to death camps.

The preoccupation with what Anders has dubbed "the forbidden zone of collective consciousness" arose in the late 1970s when Polish intellectuals realized that to fully understand themselves as Poles, they needed to confront and investigate the truth about their own history, for eight hundred years intertwined in complex ways with the history of the Jews. Nostalgia, remorse, and shame over the loss of its three million Jews has evidently been passed on to Poland's generations born after the war, some of whom have never met a living Jew, but who sense a palpable yet amorphous loss. Young Polish writers have had to concoct imaginary Jews, having few left as real models. Unsurprisingly, most have not managed to do more than invoke the cliché of Jews as history's holy or hapless scapegoats, "magical Jews" or idealized martyrs-to-be bent over a Talmud. Szczypiorski's depiction of Jews is certainly one of the inherent weaknesses in both of his novels, but in *A Mass for Arras* he has raised several provocative issues. When he writes of desire for unanimity seeming stronger than desire for truth, and when, at the novel's end, he asks: "What kind of faith can those on the bottom and those on top have in common? Those who judge and those who are judged?" we realize that his despairing cynicism is even more justified today than it was five centuries after those dire events of 1485.

Two new, luminously translated novels, *Annihilation* by a young Polish journalist, Piotr Szewc, and *The Little Town Where Time Stood Still* by the Czech master Bohumil Hrabal, nostalgically evoke those vanished worlds of pre-war Poland and Czechoslovakia that in retrospect burst with color and zest, painfully innocent of what history holds in store for them. Published to ecstatic reviews in Europe, *Annihilation* was originally graced with an introduction (omitted by the book's American publisher)

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by the distinguished Polish writer Julian Strykowski, who delighted in the author's attempt to see his hometown through a camera lens and the novel's distinctive "lack of plot, lack of dialogue, and lack of psychologism."

Annihilation captures one day in the life of picturesque Zamosc, a Polish-Jewish (as the dust-jacket describes it) town, in an anxious attempt, eerily reminiscent of ghetto and death camp chronicles, ". . . to see. To be. To remember. To record scrupulously. One more photograph. And then another. To follow what disappears. Not to miss anything." Yet the narrator admits the futility of his efforts, knowing the ephemera of this time and place "will vanish in the turmoil." Time in Zamosc seems to be standing still. "Nothing happens," the narrator declares, quick to add, "Nothing can be stopped."

Zamosc's citizens haven't a clue about the impending catastrophe alluded to in the book's Polish title (which translates as "Holocaust"), much like their counterparts in the novels set in pre-war by Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld. Yet the reader and Szewc are all too aware of what lurks ahead for the mysterious Chasidim as they eerily vanish into an "empty" Jewish cemetery, shrouded in mist. Swecz does everything in his narrative powers to counteract the workings of time, to bring his beloved imagined town back to life, lavishing attention on sensory minutiae and evanescent happenings soon to vanish. Zamosc's dreamlike beauty is already mixed with ribbons of smoke rising from chimneys, trains rolling by the edge of town, dust and clouds – alarm signals readers of Holocaust or annihilation literature will recognize. If Swecz's evocative "photographs" had been real, they doubtless would have been burned, scattered, lost, or would lie buried somewhere, perhaps awaiting discovery. But who would there be left to identify – or identify with – the faces and lives he has tried so valiantly to capture and save?

The action, or pronounced lack of it, in the two novellas of Bohumil Hrabal's *The Little Town Where Time Stood Still,* takes place in a sleepy Czech village just before and shortly after World War II, encompassing but only obliquely alluding to the horrors suffered under the rule of the Gestapo, and later, of Communism. Hrabal (b. 1914), who began to devote himself fully to his writing only in 1962, has an exotic résumé even by Eastern European standards. He completed his studies at Prague's Charles University with a doctorate in law, but found it impossible to practice under the German occupation after 1939. (One Czech critic remarked, "The only bar that the law school graduate Hrabal ever came close to was the one in any number of Prague's pubs," where he is tremendously popular). A jack-of-all-trades who has worked as a traveling salesman, notary's clerk, postman, dealer in scrap paper, stagehand, and

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steelworker, Hrabal went unpublished until 1956, when Jiri Kolar issued a semi-legal, not-for-sale Bibliophile Club edition of two of Hrabal's stories. Hrabal soon became a literary star, deemed a national hero, a revolutionary of prose, a writer of the people.

Following the Soviet invasion of 1968 the secret police ruthlessly harassed Hrabal for having supported Alexander Dubcek. After a prolonged period of hospitalization, his nerves totally frayed, Hrabal publicly declared his support for a never-defined notion of "socialism," and signed the "Anti-Charter," forced upon him by the Czechoslovak regime in retaliation for the publication of Charter 77, signed by most of his friends. This permitted Hrabal to publish "officially," though his novels remained "subversive," thus censored "preventatively" or radically disfigured by "editorial" changes. His works, which include the popular *Closely Watched Trains, Too Loud a Solitude,* and *I Served the King of England,* would hence appear in Czechoslovakia in two guises – complete but clandestine in *samizdat* and expurgated but sanctioned in another.

Hrabal has always been attracted to people who have suffered but endured upheavals and to times of postwar confusion. *The Little Town,* a dirge for pre-communist times written in 1973, is no exception. Twice published abroad in emigré editions, it didn't appear in Prague restored to its entirety until after the 1989 Velvet Revolution.

"I don't actually write," Hrabal has claimed in interviews. "I cut, and then glue the cut-outs together into collages," montages composed of scraps of reality, dreams, and flights of surrealist fantasy. The joint heroines of the collage-like "Cutting It Short" (the first novella) are the irrepressible, sensuous Maryska and her glorious flowing hair, to which Hrabal devotes pages of rapturous description. Maryska's fragrant hair, "a hark back to the golden days of yore," enchants all who come into contact with her and her mane, "as if I was part of a Catholic rite, as if my hair was part of some feast of the church," she boasts. Her husband Francin, manager of the local brewery, adores Maryska for her tresses, which, in her words, "spread out and enveloped me like music" and "glittered and shone like a papal banner."

But Francin loves his impulsive and flamboyant wife best when she pretends to be an ailing dependent, "a nice decent woman sitting at home," a role ill-suited to this sybarite who gorges on cherries and tries to keep up with the latest fashion by shortening not only her skirts – scandal enough! – but also her dog's tail, the legs of a table, and finally her own illustrious hair. Francin's anger and grief over Maryska's rebellious haircut, which all but shatters his insular world, gives some inkling of how ill-prepared he and his Czech neighbors are for the seismic eruptions soon to reshape their sleepy little town.

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The second novella, "The Little Town Where Time Stood Still," narrated by Maryska and Francin's son, opens eight years later, with German and Russian soldiers still in Czechoslovakia, and Communism – which *really* makes time stand still – on its way. "Everything linked with the old era had fallen anti-clockwise into a slumber." The family – including Uncle Pepin with his "lovely ladies, dances and sprees," who came for a fortnight visit but stays until his piteous death years later, and his motorbike-loving brother Francin who loses his job when his brewery is nationalized – weather the assaults of history, aging, and decline into physical and spiritual decrepitude. Yet through it all there is Hrabal's gift for bittersweet irony and mordant satire, his Swecz-like photographic hyper-sensitivity to nature's marvels, and his ribald humor. Considered both the most quintessentially "Czech" and most poetic of Czech writers – hence resistant to translation – Hrabal is blessed to have had James Naughton as translator of this book.

Do Czech women, like the mythic Clairol blondes, have more fun? Where do they find the energy for those unbridled, guilt-free sex lives we read about so frequently in contemporary Czech fiction? Is it only Czech men who concoct these tireless nymphets and ever-ready studs? Apparently not: the non-stop skirt-chasing and even misogyny that has for years bedeviled Czech fiction has found its funhouse-mirror image in Iva Pekárková's *Truck Stop Rainbows: A Road Novel*.

The answer to a publicist's dream, the savvy Pekárková has garnered more attention than any other Eastern European novelist in recent memory. The print media from the glossies to *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York Newsday* couldn't resist interviewing – and photographing – this twenty-nine year-old behind the wheel of her New York yellow taxicab (during night shift, no less). All this diverted attention, however, from her novel's underlying seriousness. Trained as a biologist, Pekárková escaped her homeland in 1985 (hitchhiking, with the help of a British truck driver) and spent several years in an Austrian refugee camp before settling briefly in Boston, where she wrote this novel "with a Paper Mate pen over the course of ten straight weeks." First published in 1989 in Czech by Sixty-Eight Publishers (a Canadian house specializing in books banned in Czechoslovakia's communist regime), *Truck Stop Rainbows*, its cover adorned with a hitchhiking naked angel, is now available and selling briskly in the Czech Republic. "Perhaps people think it's porn," its author has quipped.

Far more than that, it is an indictment of myriad aspects of Czech life under the regime. Pekarkova aims her potshots at public transportation ("sexual transports" described by the locals as "open for gropin' " traveled by sex-starved "walruses, melancholy older men with St. Bernard eyes,

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who simply couldn't resist the innocently pursed asses of those enticingly young girls"); at the unavailability of desperately needed equipment like wheelchairs (a ten-year wait is standard, if the patient hasn't died by then), the devastating effects of years of toxic industrial pollution (denied or unreported), the dull sameness of pre-fab concrete housing, woefully inadequate health care, awful food and shoddy clothing (the heroine's ill-fitting brassieres need to be knotted in the back, and her pants "leap at opportunities to unzip themselves"); and the truckers passing through her country who condescendingly see it "as sort of a pigsty." All have the bitter ring of truth.

Fialka, the novel's sardonic twenty-five year old narrator, realizes when her closest friend and co-rebel Patrik (both "seekers of truth" armed with cameras) gets diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (after weeks of inexplicable impotence), that to get him a wheelchair quickly, she'll need hard currency. What begins as Fialka's serendipitous, freedom-seeking one-night stands on the Northern Route frequented by Czech truckers eager to "capture rainbows" away from the ubiquitous grayness of life, ends with her switching to the Southern Route with its long-distance cash-carrying Inter-truckers, where she metamorphosizes overnight into a highway hooker, a grotesque variation on her once pure-hearted sybaritic self. "Hair a shade too dark to be just the shining color that gets blondes kidnapped in films, " Fialka initially notes she's the type who "requires just a little effort in order to look . . . a hundred percent more marketable. Of course I adamantly refused to be marketable." Fialka does, of course, relent and undergoes a dramatic, depressing makeover – she has plenty of teenage competition out there on the road. Her creator, however, is canny enough to realize that both she and Fialka are perfectly marketable being the free spirit she already is.

Zdenek Urbánek's *On the Sky's Clayey Bottom: Sketches and Happenings from the Years of Silence* offers a far more subtle look at Czech life – its misfortunes and its countless, often silenced victims. Asked to describe the connecting thread winding through the thirty-six eponymous "sketches and happenings," that make up the novel, Urbanek replied that each reflects "the experience of a freely thinking mind inside a country which was . . . compelled to accept a totalitarian regime." Urbánek's sketches vary in length from one page to thirty, somewhere between journalistic reportage and free-floating nightmare, between shattering pessimism and a desperate attempt to get at "a speck of truth" when "living in truth" seems an oxymoronic impossibility. *On the Sky's Clayey Bottom* is culled from a much larger collection that appeared in two *samizdat* volumes as *Lost Countries* in the 1980s. Many of Urbánek's compressed sketches read like dramatic monologues; he is a master of ellipsis, irony

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and understatement.

A leading dissident (Charter 77 was composed on Urbánek's typewriter by Havel with Urbanek by his side) and a towering figure – a "lighthouse" and "the embodiment of decency" as people in Prague admiringly have described him – in Czech culture as an essayist, novelist, and translator (particularly of Shakespeare), Urbánek is reticent to talk about his extraordinary acts of bravery and humanity during the war, which last year earned him the title "Righteous Among the Nations" at Yad Yashem. Not only did he provide a haven in his tiny apartment to over twenty people ("I didn't count them, nor did I save their 'lives'- I only saved the moment" he modestly claims), but he also helped get packages of food for his Jewish friends in hiding and in Terezin.

Under the Sky's tales of confinement, isolation, paranoia, disappointment, silencing and grief do not make for easy reading, and its few light moments provoke what Urbánek's doomed tour guide in "Relato Refero" endures – "laughter that rather resembled tears." It is no wonder that so many of Urbánek's sufferers attempt, and usually succeed at, suicide, leaving behind what one calls "dreams that are now vanished." Heroes here end up dead or tortured, and those who remain alive do so by compromise and by hiding behind a shield of indifference. In "The Music Theater," a man in the audience watches Honegger's *Joan of Arc* and muses in an imaginary conversation with the composer:

> We're all born with the same opportunity and with a hidden desire to become great. And then we walk the streets in colorless clothing; we avoid danger; here and there we make a gesture by which some woman we admire might remember us, or some man who is more important than we are, and we seek his intervention on our behalf. Slowly we all grow grey, and from the trip to the stake, which could have made a legend of us, there remains only the trip to the office, to the movies, a rendezvous, to the music theatre. . . . Were there a real stake in front of us and Joan upon it, the result would be different today. You wouldn't have the strength to make her say it. ("Il y a de joie qui est forte."). We all go away indifferent.

Yet Urbánek's dark world seems like a benign introduction to the even darker, more sinister and paranoid Romanian reality – or unreality – we encounter in Norman Manea's *Compulsory Happiness,* another attempt to "preserve the truth, the reality of memory." Born in Bukovina in 1936, Manea spent four years in a concentration camp in Transnistria (from which Aharon Appelfeld and Paul Celan, then age eight and fifteen, also escaped). Until 1986 he lived in Romania, "the guinea pig of two totali-

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tarian regimes – one fascist, the other Communist."

The plastic raincoat worn by Urbánek's Hruska, a bumbling State Security agent who bursts into the wrong apartment, harrassing the wrong people, warning them not to tell their neighbors they're being watched or "you can count on having unpleasant consequences for yourself" reappears as a terrifying, ubiquitous and mysterious threat throughout Manea's novella-length "The Trenchcoat." Urbánek's paranoid monologist in "The Figure Swimmer" who confesses with tic-like regularity, "I need to spend some time in the open air" prefigures Manea's characters trapped by unending paranoia, psychological suffocation and "bleached-out boredom." Both Manea and Urbánek mirror the moral ambiguity and sense of entrapment in personal as well as public life by dialogue that often conceals more than it reveals. (One can never presume the authors themselves know exactly the identities of the ubiquitous "they" and "them" who take up so much psychological space in story after story.) The pervasiveness of untruth ("in the style of the times" as Manea sardonically puts it), the widespread exasperation and soul-destroying fear and suspicion exacerbate the sense of imprisonment that afflicts his characters. We sense the edginess and terror, the breakdown and disillusion that drive so many to madness or suicide, often the only viable exit.

In "The Interrogation," Manea's deranged interrogator tells "his" prisoner, Sia Strihan, that he, like her

> was a firebrand for quite a while. Yes, me too. Perhaps there's still a fire in my belly, but it feeds on a colder, more artificial fuel. That's why my employers consider me skilled at handling special cases. Because, as I told you, I once was one myself. . . . I'm the product, some would add the symbol, of corruption. . . . Even if I wanted to, I couldn't keep them from continuing to interrogate you. To shock and offend you, sometimes to torment you. They like driving things into the ground, there's nothing I can do about it. They think the whole apparatus will get rusty if it isn't constantly at work, that's their rule.

Manea's imprisoned character Sia Strihan is forced to draw – every day – pictures of the house where she and her friends- "enemies of the state" - met. "Memory," she's told, "in the last analysis, will in turn find itself serving the obsession." Manea's continuing obsession is the barbarity and bitterness of his era, and in the four novellas that comprise *Compulsory Happiness* he exposes the "gigantic and useless efforts dedicated to an absurd and never-ending mission" of the *apparatchiks,* the informers, and those whose biographies were "distorted" for political reasons. In

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"Composite Biography," Manea allows us to follow Camarade Vasile Cotiga through multiple incarnations from 1945 through the 1970s, "barricaded behind his stiff manner. A loner . . . " We read his police dossier, written in officialese, and peer at him through a series of refracted lenses, as Cotiga shifts through a dozen or so names and pseudonyms, and even more political stances and occupations. The narrated "reports" on his colleagues and family, his transfers, promotions, treatments in sanatoriums (he's spied on even there), are bone-chilling. "We have in our possession the articles he wrote during this period," one innocuous dossier entry reads.

Manea subtly leaks out details about his characters – things even they don't know about themselves – through confessions, overheard conversations, dreams, police files, and unsurprisingly, their nightmares. Amidst the bizarre and even hilarious details of daily life under "that national clown" Ceausescu, and despite their literary pyrotechnics and breathtaking, sensual imagery, Manea's stories offer a horrific vision of a world gone berserk from boredom, pain, and unending vigilance. We learn in the volume's final story, "The Trenchcoat," that even death, subject to new regulations, is no longer a simple matter: "The latest edict, regarding the obligatory burial of deceased persons in the locality where they rendezvoused with the Grim Reaper. You've heard about that, have you?"

Knowing that Albania's was an even more repressive regime than Manea's Romania, we sense that Ismael Kadare didn't have to overtax his imagination to invent his own vision of hell. "I kept weighing up what an ambitious and over-fanciful proposal this was, though, after those unknown Egyptians, after Virgil, Saint Augustine and, above all, Dante," he has stated. But Kadare has succeeded: His Albanian hell makes even Manea's and Urbanek's seem like mere prison furloughs. The author of such critically acclaimed works as the autobiographical novel *Chronicle in Stone* (1987), *The General of the Dead Army* (1991) and *Broken April* (1990), now exiled from Albania, Kadare was for many years the country's "cultural ambassador." He has been a perennial candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature and is a best-selling author in France where he sought political asylum in 1990, yet he is curiously all but unknown in America.

George Orwell would, I imagine, be impressed by the overarching metaphor of Kadare's new novel, *The Palace of Dreams,* in which a totalitarian state monitors and analyzes its inhabitants' every dream. Privacy and the rights to one's own thoughts here constitute a dream no one dares have. Tabir Sarrail, the mysterious Palace of Dreams, stands at the epicenter of its Sultan's power. Its primary function is to alert the Sultan of impending doom, by monitoring and interpreting the symbols that appear in his countrymen's dreams, which are collected daily. Absolute secrecy is

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demanded in every step of the dream enterprise – the collection, sorting, and interpretation process. Mistakes are punished, often by abduction and murder.

We learn about the labyrinthine world of the Tabir Sarrail through Mark-Alem, a scion of the aristocratic Quprili family. The paranoid insistence on complete secrecy he encounters at the Palace of Dreams which "stands alone and apart from human turmoil, outside all competing opinions and struggles for power, impervious to everything and without contacts with anyone," strongly resembles recent Albanian history under President Enver Hoxha, who managed to cut Albania off from the rest of the world. (In postwar Albania, religion was banished, beards and long hair forbidden, and borders were closed. At one point, the government made complaints about food shortages punishable by prison terms.)

Mark-Alem's mother, who helps arrange for him to work at the Palace, imagines it to be:

> the only institution capable of ensuring her son's happiness . . . its main advantage lay in its vagueness and impenetrability . . . Reality split in two there and led swiftly to unreality, and the resulting mistiness seemed . . . likely to offer her son the best possible refuge when storms broke.

Arriving at his low-level post in the Palace during a "busy period," Mark-Alem learns that dreams and the files holding them "swell as the weather grew colder." He hears from a Palace old-timer about "the ebb and flow of dreams," and how their quantity is affected by meteorological and astronomical phenomena. He envisions thousands of makeshift offices, "sometimes mere shacks," from where peasants were obliged to "set out before dawn and trudge through the rain and mud to relate their dreams . . . Most of them couldn't even read or write, so they came very early in the day so as not to forget their dreams."

Exhausted copyists mark most of these peasant-dreams "Useless" and discard them as part of "the winnowing process." Palace clerks work behind mysterious, unmarked doors in a network of windowless passages, shuffling about in quiet, dazed herds. Mark-Alem rarely sees the same person twice. "A permanent cloud of apprehension hung over everything," Kadare writes. Frightened and alienated, Kadare's workers (much like Manea's in "Composite Biography") sit "totally cut off from one another at cold desks strewn with crazy visions conjured up by the minds of strangers." Ever fearful of getting lost within the Palace, its cellars bursting with nightmares and wild imaginings, Mark-Alem believes "he'd rather be on a frozen plain or in a forest infested with wolves. Yes, a thousand

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times rather!"

Kadare laconically describes Mark-Alem's horrifying visit to the Archives, whose huge rooms are devoted to dreams of "profound captivity," others to anxieties, hallucinations, as well as to dreams of each sovereign and to dreams of the insane. We are impelled to share the bewilderment and anxiety, fatalism and weariness that Mark-Alem feels in this underworld where dreams take on an oppressive afterlife of their own, where those who misinterpret or overlook the "crucial" dream and its symbolism are "disappeared." The story of Mark-Alem's meteoric rise through the Palace's bureaucracy (we can only guess at the price this will extract) is artfully intertwined with the four-hundred-year history of Mark-Alem's family, "fated equally to glory and to misfortune." "We Quprilics," Mark-Alem's favorite uncle jests, "we're like people living at the foot of Vesuvius. Just as they are covered with ashes when the volcano erupts, so are we every so often struck down by the Sovereign in whose shadow we live."

The Palace of Dreams was, like most of the books discussed here, banned in its native country. "Dictatorship and authentic literature are incompatible," Kadare has remarked. Yet one continually marvels at the literature which has sprung up under the heels of tyrants. In his recent essay on totalitarianism, the British writer John Berger got it right: "Most literature has been made by the disinherited or the exiled. Both states fix attention upon experience and thus on the need to redeem it from oblivion, to hold it tight in the dark."

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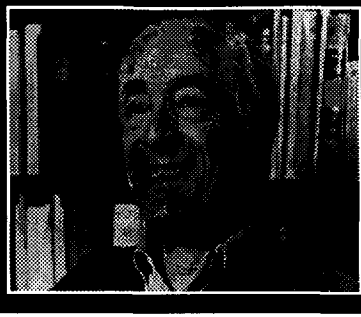

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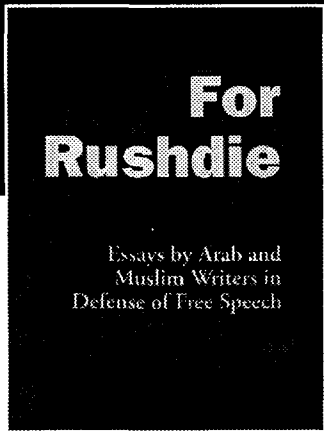

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MORRIS DICKSTEIN

Self-Tormentors

Like many New York filmgoers, I first encountered Martin Scorsese when his third feature, *Mean Streets*, made its debut at the New York Film Festival in 1973. This searching portrait of young toughs in Little Italy reminded me of my excitement at seeing Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution* at the same festival nearly a decade earlier. Despite the Italian connection, and the sense of powerful emotions coming from the screen, the two directors were quite different. Where Bertolucci, like his mentor Visconti, was operatic and youthfully romantic in his free treatment of Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma,* Scorsese's film, with its accumulation of atmospheric details of urban street-life, more closely resembled the naturalism of *Studs Lonigan*. Yet there was something distinctly European about *Mean Streets*. Like so many New Wave films of the early sixties including *Breathless* and *Shoot the Piano Player,* it seemed casual, improvised, yet self-conscious, sacrificing linear plot for a gut-wrenching sense of reality. Along with a handful of films by Coppola, De Palma, Lucas, and Spielberg, *Mean Streets* heralded the arrival of a new moviemaking generation.

These directors are still making movies today, yet the vagaries of the industry and their uneven talent have kept them from fully realizing their promise. Lucas and Spielberg quickly lost interest in personal filmmaking; instead, like old Hollywood professionals, they developed a canny instinct for appealing to a mass audience. De Palma went from brilliantly kinky thrillers like *Carrie, The Fury, Blow Out,* and *Body Double* to mainstream big-budget movies that showed only his technical mastery and taste for violence or absurdity. Of all the young directors who captivated us twenty years ago, only Scorsese produced an uncompromising body of work that bears his own stamp in virtually every frame.

All through his career, Scorsese has alternated between personal films like *Who's That Knocking at My Door?, Mean Streets, Taxi Driver, Raging Bull,* and *GoodFellas* and extremely well-crafted commercial films like *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore, After Hours, The Color of Money,* and *Cape Fear* – with only an occasional dud like *The King of Comedy* (a pointless and irritating film with a few brilliant touches). The personal films usually have a strong autobiographical thread. Scorsese sets explosive Method actors like Harvey Keitel, Robert De Niro, and Joe Pesci in an urban,

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ethnic, usually Italian milieu. There they enact his indelible memories of the families, the streets, the houses, the bars and pool halls, the women, the guilt feelings, the petty hoods and mob capos – the whole texture of communal life and private longing. The spine of Scorsese's work is a series of disturbing studies of young Italian manhood in America: films that are full-blooded yet fragmentary in their quasi-documentary manner, elliptical in their narrative disjunctions, profoundly unsettling in their emotional and physical violence, focusing on self-destructive characters who virtually dare us to identify with them.

Raging Bull is perhaps the most problematic of the harsh biographical portraits that create: a distinctive world, a neighborhood, a whole mental environment for us. Robert De Niro's portrayal of middleweight boxer Jake La Motta became one of the most grating of the bad-boy surrogates he played for Scorsese, roles that included Johnny Boy in *Mean Streets,* the psychotic urban avenger Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver,* the quarrelsome saxophone player Jimmy Doyle in *New York, New York,* the unbearable nonentity Rupert Pupkin in *The King of Comedy,* and, most recently, the insidious creature who menaces Nick Nolte and his family in the remake of *Cape Fear.*

When I first saw *Raging Bull* I felt battered and wasted from spending two hours locked up with this character, who alienates everyone dear to him, who wins and then loses everything – a man whose torment leads to so little self-understanding or dramatic resolution. The director had always distrusted that kind of linear narrative and closure, but here, as Pauline Kael remarked in her stinging review, "Scorsese's excesses verge on self-parody."

Kael's attack was the exception. *Raging Bull* was a great critical success, and finally in 1989 it was chosen in a critics' poll as the best American movie of the decade. From the moment it appeared, *Raging Bull* was certified as a work of art even by those who disliked it. Scorsese made *Raging Bull* at the end of a difficult and self-destructive period in his own life, after the failure of his most ambitious film, *New York, New York,* when drugs, illness, and a failed marriage nearly killed him. He channeled a keen sense of waste and self-loathing into the loutish figure of La Motta, who was something of a freak as champion, more an indestructible battering ram than a great fighter.

What interests Scorsese and De Niro is not the champ but the man who threw it all away. (This is one of the many links between the personal films and the story of Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence,* Scorsese's most recent and most surprising work.) When the grotesquely overweight ex-boxer is thrown into a shadowy prison cell near the end,

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he beats his head and fists against the wall, crying, "Why, why, why?" and "So stupid." Scorsese is summing up the pathetically damaged life of a man who has squandered his strength. The final scene is a hall of mirrors in which La Motta, now a cabaret entertainer, rehearses Marlon Brando's "I coulda been a contender" speech to himself in the mirror of his dressing room just before a performance. La Motta, shadowboxing, is finally at ease with himself, emotionally flat, all passion spent. But how far he has come from the lyrical shadowboxing of the opening shot! There we saw the young boxer in the smoky ring, dancing around in muted color, ecstatically alone but for the occasional flashbulb and the swelling music of Mascagni on the soundtrack.

Boxing films reached their peak during the *film noir* period, when they always had a whiff of Dostoevsky about them. The gyms and bars where boxers hung out, the sleazy arenas where they fought, the shady characters and fleabag hotels, even the fighting itself, had less to do with sports than with the dark night of the soul. Though their apparent subject is physical punishment – Joyce Carol Oates notes that "contrary to stereotyped notions, boxing is primarily about being, not giving, hurt" – boxing films have always been about the ordeals and humiliations that lead to spiritual redemption.

In Robert Wise's *noir* classic *The Set-Up* (1949), made the same year La Motta won the title, Robert Ryan plays a broken-down thirty-five year-old fighter who is so demoralized that his manager takes a paltry bribe to throw a fight and doesn't even tell him – he's so sure his man will lose anyway. When Ryan, in an unexpected surge of self-respect, fights to win and actually does win, his manager and trainer take a powder, and he gets his hand destroyed by the enraged fixer. His harried wife, who can't stand the punishment he's taken all along and has tried to leave him, instead gets him back, damaged but still alive, free at last from the ordeal in the arena. When she cradles him in her arms, he tells her, "I won tonight." "We both won tonight," she says, reclaiming him before body and soul have been completely destroyed.

The spiritual dimension of boxing movies shows not so much in the seedy life, the shady moral atmosphere, but in the physical trials themselves – the masochism, the gladiatorial spectacle, the intimacy and exposure – filmed at such close quarters that we ourselves are in the ring. In *The Set-Up* these two-bit fighters are society's outcasts, the insulted and the injured, bashing each others' heads while a bloodthirsty crowd shrieks for more. Knocked around by petty gangsters, crooked retainers, and worthless opponents, an aging fighter gains his life by losing it, salvaging a shred of honor as he leaves the ring forever.

For Scorsese, La Motta's trials take another form, with no facile tri-

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umph at the end. Like the character played by Robert Ryan, he prides himself in being able to take a terrible beating. (In real life this brute endurance was La Motta's trademark.) Like Ryan, he is also proud of refusing to take a dive. He gets suspended for the one fight he does throw, but only after he makes the fix obvious by refusing to go down. Beaten to a pulp by Sugar Ray Robinson in their sixth and last meeting, covered with blood after losing the title, he still taunts his victorious black rival: "I never went down."

Scorsese the Italian Catholic turns a boxer's story into a Stations of the Cross movie. We cringe at every bit of crass stupidity and blind stubborness, every self-inflicted wound – everything *but* what happens in the ring. The movie blends three or four different narrative devices, including a sequence of "home movies" (in color) that conveys some superficial family fun while filling in the details of La Motta's second marriage. Otherwise, Scorsese films La Motta's hellish home life in black and white with a clumsy documentary authenticity, using awkward direct sound, mumbled dialogue that feels improvised, and a static camera that keeps its distance from the action. These scenes could have come from a Frederick Wiseman film or a chapter of PBS's *cinéma vérité* study, *An American Family*. "I want a documentary with actors," Scorsese said as he was making it.

The boxing scenes by comparison feel exhilarating even at their bloodiest. They punctuate the dreary stretches of La Motta's private life with highly charged glimpses, newsreel style, of his career in the ring. (Some of these fight scenes are modeled on actual footage of the original matches.) Filmed in slow motion, elaborately choreographed, played at different speeds, they aestheticize the boxer's world and simplify his messy life. Like Scorsese on the set or at the editing table, La Motta in the ring is a kind of artist, awkward, self-punishing, but with a flaming intensity and determination otherwise missing from his life. Although he can be a bruising fighter – at one point he destroys a man's face on a jealous whim – boxing frees him from his inner demons. It gives his life an existential purity.

Compared to most boxing movies, the fight scenes in *Raging Bull* aren't especially real or convincing. Sometimes Scorsese gives us only a few seconds of a round, really just a graphic shorthand for what the fighter goes through. (By contrast the fight scenes in *The Set-Up* unfold in real time.) But they show us the only arena where La Motta's character works for him, where he's not entirely a loser.

Another kind of visual narrative is introduced by the long shots of shadowboxing that compose the opening scene. These recur as lyrical interludes, often in slow motion, accompanied by Mascagni's surging and

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sensuous music. Such scenes magically convey the sense of another realm, a world elsewhere, where the hero escapes from the sordid details of daily life – family, domesticity, love, friendship – the ordinary human things Jake isn't very good at. Apart from such moments of glorious freedom, Scorsese rubs our nose in Jake's human ineptitude. In the early scenes we see him quarreling with his first wife, then clumsily courting the young blonde Vickie – but resisting sex to keep his strength for the ring. We take in the first flashes of insane jealousy that will drive away both his wife and brother, and we see Jake's resistance to being managed by the local mob – indeed, to anything that smacks of simply getting along. These early moments foreshadow all the stations of La Motta's crucifixion. Even when we first see him fight, Jake knocks out his opponent but loses on points as the crowd riots; already we see Jake's way of losing even when he wins.

What makes the movie so hard to bear is that we never break out of Jake's point of view. Jake is opaque and boorish but we're locked in – he's all we have. He gives and takes a mountain of abuse, and we cringe each time he does some awful, stupid thing that will only make matters worse. De Niro plays Jake as a stubborn, pigheaded man; he never listens to reason, never simply tries to get by, but his obtuseness is also a kind of integrity. Until his career collapses, Jake can always get away into the ring, where the punishment he takes is refined into a style. Only the audience has no way out, not even into pathos: Scorsese and De Niro keep us clinically detached from this painful but pitiless self-immolation.

When La Motta finally wins the title, success helps destroy him. His demons take over: his jealousy poisons his love, his paranoia undermines trust, his food binges take the place of sex. Soon all the little brutalities take on an awful horror, especially in the brilliant scene in which he accuses his brother of sleeping with his wife, then goes berserk and beats him up in front of his family. Jake is a literal-minded man: his brother Joey said something that set him off, and nothing can stop him from pushing his suspicion to the limit. But De Niro plays him in just this literal-minded way, simply *becoming* La Motta without giving us clues that would enable us to place him, to absolve him by understanding him. His La Motta has an irreducible core of craziness, especially about women, that belongs to Scorsese's anthropology of Italian-American males, and De Niro, in the ultimate post-Brando performance, all inarticulate gesture, never softens or clarifies him for us.

The most literal feature of De Niro's performance, which appalled me when I first saw the movie, was the way he had put on between fifty and seventy pounds to play the later scenes. The bloated, unrecognizable La Motta we see at the beginning and the end is also the bloated, unrecog-

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nizable De Niro, acting out on his own body what the real Jake acted out in his life. I could hardly think of a better ploy to discredit Method acting and kitchen-sink realism. It makes La Motta even harder to identify with; the fighter's body is gone, so he barely seems to be the same person; his misery seems entirely his own doing. In *Mean Streets,* his first film for Scorsese, De Niro played a clown and a screw-up but at least he had a devil-may-care flamboyance; even in his self-destructiveness he added a touch of crazy rebellion to the gray Italian neighborhood.

Above all, Scorsese didn't lock us in with this character. Just as he used Ray Liotta as the young ousider and observer in *GoodFellas,* we watch De Niro in *Mean Streets* through the eyes of the time-serving Harvey Keitel, who wants to be a good soldier in the mob, to get ahead, but also wants to save his troublemaking friend. In *Raging Bull* the weak, sensible Keitel of *Mean Streets* becomes the loyal, rational brother Joey, played wonderfully by Joe Pesci, who provides us with a reality check but no alternative way of seeing him; he loves his brother, but he's as repelled and puzzled by Jake's behavior as we are.

Though Joey can be as short-tempered and violent as Jake – there's a great scene in which he beats up some mob friends who are too cozy with Jake's wife – Joey has the Keitel character's old talent for getting along. No demons haunt him – he's sane, funny, foul-mouthed, horny, essentially normal: his brother's obsessions make no sense to him. When Jake drives Joey away, Jake loses his last link to ordinary behavior and unconditional love; his life and career go completely off the rails. "I'm a bum," Jake tells his wife, trying to make it up with her. One of the film's best scenes comes when Vickie tries to patch things up between the brothers. We see Jake with a black eye under his hat, sitting in a darkened telephone booth, an enigmatic look on his face, trying to utter into the receiver words that never come. His brother, without knowing who's on the line, emits a colorful stream of curses that tell us volumes about his comfortable attitude toward life.

The second half of the movie is full of good scenes that almost make up for the clumsy realism and willed alienation that preceded them. As he loses the title, we feel a grudging respect for the man who invites and endures this massive pounding, who stands with his arms helplessly at his side – ecstatic and unconquerable in his stoicism – with blood on the ropes, blood covering his face and legs, even splattering across the ringside seats. His brother Joey is far away, ruefully watching the match on TV. Jake is the same man who once asked Joey to hit him hard to show how tough he was, to show he wasn't someone who "takes it up the ass," the same man who later smashes his fists and head into the walls of the jail cell, who finally points the finger at himself in the mirror as his own

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worst enemy.

Scorsese himself, in many interviews he gave, insisted that Jake La Motta finds some sort of redemption at the end, much as Robert Ryan does in *The Set-Up*. This is not how the movie feels. If La Motta's *cri de coeur* in the jail cell is some kind of catharsis, the final dressing-room scene feels almost posthumous, eerie in its lack of affect, with its mirror images and references to earlier moments in the movie, other movies, other performances, other lives. A good actor (De Niro) plays a bad actor (La Motta) imitating a good actor (Brando) as he played a washed-up ex-fighter (Terry Malloy) who talks like a bum but isn't one. La Motta is preparing to put his own pain on the stage, including his break with his brother, but he hasn't enough art or life in him to make us feel it as he once could do in the ring. As he points at the face in the mirror and intones words that once meant something to someone else, we know only the downward curve from the dancing figure of the opening scene. Scorsese and De Niro have put on display something raw, painful, and unfocused in themselves, leaving us more disquieted than sympathetic.

Raging Bull is meant to be a movie that gets under our skin, and it does. It resists the notion that lives proceed in an orderly way, that stories lead to satisfying endings, that problems can be solved, that people can be much more than dumb victims of their senseless choices and wayward moods. Its hero is blind, self-destructive, irrational, and only occasionally impressive. We don't usually know why we're meant to care about him. His suffering is nakedly intense without being especially illuminating or redemptive, and this stymies what we need and expect from such painful material. After Jake's ring career is over, we can easily feel we're wasting our time, watching a master of self-degradation with some leftover life to kill.

In later films as different as *After Hours* and *GoodFellas*, Scorsese, working loosely in color, regained his humor and buoyancy. He learned again how to ease up, to balance conflicting points of view. Yet *Raging Bull*, like La Motta himself – and like De Niro's creepy impersonation of him – is finally too overwhelming to dismiss, too intricately conceived to pick apart, too honest to deny, and too haunting to forget. Out of his memories of certain Hollywood movies whose facile epiphanies he could not accept, out of his intimate knowledge of people who made their own days a living hell, Scorsese made a film that evokes Dostoevsky's treatment of the lives of sprititual misfits and "self-tormentors."

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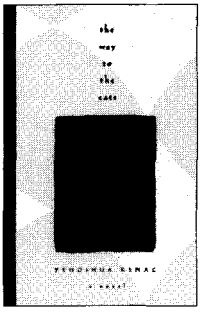

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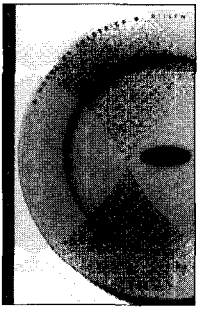

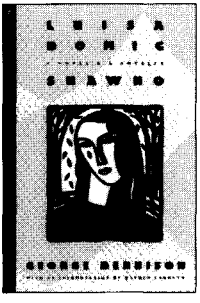

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CUSHING STROUT

The Historian and the Detective

Academics not only read and sometimes write detective stories, but the fictional detective is often a professor of English, science, law, psychology, medicine, or archaeology. An English professor, Marjorie Nicholson, pointed out in 1929 that after a day spent dealing with adolescents who have never been forced "to think or consider or judge," teachers like herself understandably sought escape in a form of literature that, at least in principle, prized precisely these mental acts in its protagonists and its readers. The classic story of detection, she argued, carries over into a popular medium, in a more playful way, the same ardor of inquiry that sustains a professional intellectual life.

Rex Stout's detective stories have in Nero Wolfe an eccentric private detective as cerebral as Holmes, but they are fortunate in having for a narrating Watson the more engaging and witty figure of Archie Goodwin. In *Murder by the Book,* Goodwin makes an important point about the detective story's appeal. He and Nero Wolfe spot the link between two violent deaths by noticing that the name of the same unknown author is mentioned in writing by both victims. Tailing a murderer and getting shot at in Central Park "has its attractions," Archie observes dryly to a group of secretaries, "but it's not half as exciting as spotting that name." It is hard to recognize this point when so many contemporary crime writers do not keep their focus on the inquiry, ignoring Dorothy Sayers's dictum that it is "artistically shocking that the reader should be taken into the author's confidence behind the investigator's back," a recurring eavesdropping technique which rapidly drops the story into the class of sensational melodrama.

The position of Nicholson, Stout, and Sayers is best kept in mind if the detective story is seen in the light of its kinship with a written history, which is also the story of the recovery of a hidden story. The fictional events, whether of the crime or the investigation of it, are connected so that what happens in the story points both forward and backward, as events in an historical narrative do. Conan Doyle was inspired by the historian Thomas Macaulay and wrote several historical novels. He has Dr. Watson tell us that Holmes's laborious study of early English charters produced unrecorded "striking results," but Doyle sketched Holmes primarily in the guise of a scientific, not an historical mind.

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One of Doyle's literary descendants, John Dickson Carr, the prolific inventor of stories about impossible crimes in locked rooms, first made the historian-detective analogy in 1931 through a character in *The Lost Gallows,* Dr. Pilgrim, who wrote a book giving solutions to historical crimes. Dr. Pilgrim declares that an historian "must have the detective faculty rather highly developed. He hunts his meager evidence through a hundred libraries, on the slenderest clues: he fits together fragments and weighs testimony, to solve a puzzle which is forgotten or to track down a murderer who has been dead five hundred years."

At the end of the thirties, R. G. Collingwood, who was not only an influential British philosopher of history but also a practicing archaeologist and historian of Roman Britain, made the point that the historian, like the detective dealing with a false confession, can by aggressive questioning turn testimony that is "ostensibly about something quite different into an answer to the question he has decided to ask." Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, by emphasizing detection's dependence on "the little grey cells," understood historical method better than Holmes, Collingwood thought, because "nothing is evidence except in relation to some definite question." He made up a short fictional murder story in Christie style to prove the point. Collingwood also emphasized the need for the historian to understand by envisaging an agent's situation: he must try to understand an emperor's edict, for example, "as if the emperor's situation were his own . . . he must go through the process which the emperor went through in deciding on this particular course." It was the same advice that Holmes urged on Scotland Yard: to get results by "always putting yourself in the other fellow's place, and thinking what you would do yourself. It takes some imagination, but it pays."

Thirty years after Collingwood, Robin Winks, an historian and a reviewer of detective stories, edited an anthology of essays by historians exercising inferential reasoning about hoaxes, forgeries, lost manuscripts, medical cases, or historic coins – matters which have often fascinated writers of detective stories. Winks's *The Historian as Detective* provided footnotes referring to kindred examples that connect fictional mystery stories analogically with the "good, gray world of professional scholarship."

Carr himself in 1936 would play the role of Dr. Pilgrim by seeking to present in the format of a detective story the historical reconstruction of an actual, famous, and unsolved case in *The Murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey.* In 1678 the well-known London magistrate was found in a ditch stabbed with a sword after he had been strangled to death. The renegade priest Titus Oates tried to link the crime with a Popish plot to poison Charles II. Three Catholic men, later proved to be innocent, died on the scaffold

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for the murder.

In 1947 Lillian de la Torre took Carr's book as a model for her own blend of fictional and historical reconstruction of another famous unsolved case, *Elizabeth Is Missing,* which she dedicated to Carr. Elizabeth Canning, a London servant girl, disappeared in 1753 and reappeared several weeks later with a vague story of mysterious abduction in an attic, a tale that intrigued her contemporaries as it has many later writers who have attempted to explain what actually happened. The English detective-story writer Josephine Tey also used the Canning case in *The Franchise Affair,* but she thoroughly updated and fictionalized it into a contemporary story.

Tey was even more deeply attracted to the much more significant and famous historical problem of the character of Richard III. Her reconstruction in *The Daughter of Time* made the detective-historian analogy explicit by having her series detective, Inspector Grant, who is confined to hospital, work from portraits, histories, and documents with the help of an American graduate student to arrive at historical conclusions that profoundly challenge the familiar version promoted by Shakespeare's play. His version relies on Tudor propaganda about the usurping king as a ruthless murderer of anyone who stood in his way. "I am determined to prove a villain," he announces in the first speech of *The Tragedy of Richard III.* As good as his word, Shakespeare's physically deformed and perfidious Richard organizes the killing of his brother George and woos Anne Neville while boasting that he has killed her husband and her father-in-law. He has Lord Hastings beheaded on a trumped-up charge of treason and plots to usurp the throne as the only legitimate heir, having discredited his brother Edward and his children as illegitimate. "I am so far in blood," he confesses, "that sin will pluck on sin." In the most memorable climax of his career in sin he imprisons his two young nephews in the Tower of London, hires James Tyrrel to kill them, and plans to dispose of his wife so that he can marry his niece, in order to secure his hold on the throne.

The Daughter of Time aims to rehabilitate the reputation of a legendary villain and indict his royal successor, Henry VII, for framing an innocent man. Jeremy Potter, the chairman of the Richard III Society, devoted to giving Richard an honored place in English history, estimates that Tey did more than anyone else to attract members, who have arrived in a steady flow since the 1950s. One of the sturdiest American champions of her cause was Rex Stout.

A contemporary of Tey, Cyril Hare (the pseudonym of an English judge), wrote detective stories which are distinguished for their credible and ingenious handling of evidence. T. J. Binyon in his study of the detective in fiction noted only two series heroes who are historians, but

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neither of them combines history and detective work with the success and panache of Cyril Hare's Dr. Wencelaus Bottwink in *An English Murder*. Hare appreciated to the full the detective-historian analogy by making his detective a Central European Jewish refugee historian, who has been invited to an English manor house to work on documents in the muniment room. A curious outsider to English social life, the professor has an insider's knowledge of English political history, which enables him to solve a current political crime committed in the house where he is working.

The examples of Carr, de la Torre, Tey, and Hare can be looked at in the light of a problem noted in principle by John Buchan, who wrote historical novels and histories as well as his more famous spy stories, such as *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. In dramatizing history there is the difficulty that "to get the best results as literature it is unfortunately true that the narrative must fail a little as history." Similarly, when it succeeds as history, it may fail a little as literature because the research tends to overwhelm the literary problems of characterization and narrative development. Carr understood the problem well in theory; he noted in *The Murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey* that while true-crime stories may be psychologically interesting, "c'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas le roman policier." Life, like some blundering Dr. Watson, might ignore the implicit rules of fiction and even reveal the culprit to be someone who has all along been suspected, or might "whisk out of the cupboard somebody of whom the reader has never previously heard." Carr thought he had found in the Godfrey case, however, "a very nearly perfect detective story" in which the reader could pursue "the shrewdly scattered clues" to the real murderer, who could "walk and talk unsuspected throughout the story" among "half a dozen persons who might have committed the murder, each suspected in turn, and each in turn proved innocent."

Carr unfortunately does not satisfy his own criteria. He examines the case closely for at least thirteen different suspects, but as Cyril Hare noted, it is "comparatively easy to hide a joker in a full pack. The three-card trick takes some doing." Carr himself admits that "no fiction writer would dare to be as complicated" as the scene of the Godfrey case, with so many characters "all treading on each other's heels and confusing each other's trails." As fiction, his history disappoints by whisking out of the cupboard a murderer who has only briefly been glimpsed before in the story; as history, it disappoints by giving the culprit, the brutal Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, a merely private motive of revenge for Godfrey's role in a grand jury that had once indicted Herbert.

A contemporary historian, Stephen Knight, in *The Killing of Justice Godfrey*, has also fingered the same Mad Peer, but by looking further into the life of the victim he has provided a more convincing (and compli-

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cated) historical motive. Knight identifies Godfrey as a devout Protestant involved with a seditious band of Protestant republicans, who were conspiring for a Cromwellian succession, instead of a royal one by the Catholic Duke of York. Godfrey betrayed his fellow-plotters by befriending the Duke of York's secretary, Edward Coleman, who was accused by Titus Oates of participating in the Popish plot against Charles II. Godfrey's former allies used Herbert to stage-manage a murder that could plausibly be blamed on the Catholics.

Tey's *The Franchise Affair* has plenty of characterization, action, suspense and surprise, perhaps because it has no intention of being historical about the Canning case, which inspired the premise of her contemporary plot. De la Torre's version of the Canning case, however, is thoroughly researched and presented in abundant detail, including Elizabeth's exile to Weathersfield, Connecticut, as a serving-maid for seven years. The author's "conclusion for connoisseurs in mystery" follows Carr in using a Collingwoodian method of question-and-answer to sift the possibilities: Elizabeth told the truth, lied, or mixed them together. The author suggests an explanation of hysterical amnesia to account for Canning's mixture in her story of true memories, "cloudy recalls from the amnesic period," and "self-glorifying fantasies." De la Torre originally conjured her solution as a fictional idea and then came to believe that it was historically true. Her final conclusion, while psychologically plausible, is something of a deflationary anticlimax: "She never told her secret; she never knew what it was."

Tey's Inspector Grant and his American friend construct an alternative view of Richard and Henry VII in *The Daughter of Time* which they are surprised to discover has been constructed before by earlier historians. Grant proceeds as if he were following Collingwood's advice: "If you want to know why a certain kind of thing happened in a certain kind of case, you must begin by asking, 'What did you expect?' You must consider what the normal development is in cases of that kind. Only then, if the thing that happened in this case was exceptional, should you try to explain it by appeal to exceptional conditions." Dealing with the issue of the princes in the Tower, Grant finds that in the short time between Richard's succession and his death "everyone behaves quite normally" with "no suggestion that spectacular and unnecessary murder has just taken place in the family." Nor does Richard's successor, Henry Tudor, in the Act of Attainder against Richard specifically accuse him of murdering the princes. Moreover, Henry suppresses Titulus Regius, the act authorizing Richard's title to the throne, because it referred to a "pre-contract," a previous promise of marriage between Richard's brother Edward and Lady Butler, thus by legal custom making illegitimate Edward's

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children by another woman whom he actually married. Henry's own claim to the throne, however, rested on his marriage to a sister of those very children, Richard's nephews.

Grant does discover "a break in the pattern" when he finds that there was no public fuss during Richard's reign about the missing princes and that King Henry VII had twice pardoned the boys' murderer, Sir James Tyrrel. Grant concludes that the King had Tyrrel murder the boys after Richard's death because, after the suppression of Titulus Regius (with its reference to the "pre-contract"), Edward IV's children had become once again legitimate heirs and therefore a threat to Henry's hold on the throne.

Tey's story must tilt any balance between thought and action by focusing entirely on her hero's hypothesizing, because her detective cannot get out of bed. Though he plays the part of an historian, he sees himself, nevertheless, as a police officer pitted in an adversarial way not only against conventional histories but against historians in general, who lack his own experienced knowledge of human nature as a Scotland Yard man. He is outraged by Sir Thomas More's influential and prejudicial account of Richard because More was not an eyewitness; and he is indignant that historians condemn Richard as a murderer while their prose expresses "placid acceptance" of the Tudors' "settled and considered policy to rid themselves of all rivals to the throne."

The irony is that all of Grant's arguments (as he discovers) were made in 1906 by Sir Clements R. Markham. He was a man of action, an explorer and geographer who had taken up the cause as an amateur in an extended debate with an academic historian. This kind of debate between "a romantic enthusiast" and "a reclusive scholar," as Jeremy Potter has pointed out, tended to recur until in 1955, four years after Tey's novel, Paul Murray Kendall's widely read biography did for scholarship what Tey had done for a popular audience in rehabilitating Richard's reputation.

Tey's reliance on Markham misses some pertinent historical points. In 1483, a foreigner in London, Dominic Mancini, part of a French mission to the English court, noted in a report (discovered in 1934) that there were rumors of the princes being murdered, though he did not say how or by whom. Tey also ignores the examination made in 1933 of the bones discovered in 1674 in the Tower of London where St. Thomas More had said they were buried. The examiners concluded that they were the bones of children about the ages of twelve and ten. If they are the bones of the princes, then, contrary to Tey's conclusions, they died before Henry Tudor became king. She would have found comfort, however, in a more precise examination of the bones, made in 1963, that found it impossible to say when the victims had died, how old they were,

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or what killed them.

Tey assumes that Richard had no motive for murdering the princes because they were legally illegitimate. Yet one of the princes had been proclaimed king at age twelve, in the year that his father died, and Richard himself had presented the boy-king to enthusiastic crowds in London. Claims of illegitimacy were usually politically contestable and revisable. In a turbulent time there might be uprisings in favor of the Queen's children. "He may well have believed," as the historian Rosemary Horrox has suggested about Richard's usurpation, "that the fictionalization inherent in Woodville's control of the heir posed such a threat to political stability that his own rule was preferable – he may have persuaded himself, in fact, that he was acting for the good of the realm."

Tey's argument from silence cuts both ways. If Richard were innocent, why didn't he parade the children before the public to still the rumors that they were dead? Nor is Henry's silence about the nephews inexplicable. Elizabeth Jenkins points out that Henry, as king, framed and executed the Earl of Warwick, who was the son of Richard's brother George. The Earl, a boy of retarded intelligence was "the weakest menace of a disputed succession." Henry Tudor could not afford in 1502 to publish Tyrrel's confession, because making the accusation against Richard about an event nineteen years past might stir up public discussion of Henry's own quite recent political murder of a potential young rival for the throne.

Cyril Hare's *An English Murder* manages remarkably well to join fiction and history without sacrificing one to the other. The story is entirely fictional in a classical way, taking place in an English country house at Christmas time. The historian who plays detective in a Holmesian manner finds it "impossible to avoid ratiocination." He solves the crime by his knowledge of English constitutional history, enabling him to perceive a crucial motive for a murder. He knows of a case in 1806 that is a clue, just as the dog that did nothing in the night was a clue for Holmes in "Silver Blaze." Because Lord Chatham did not die from his illness, his heir William Pitt, who was both Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer, was not kicked upstairs into the House of Lords. If he had been, by the "grim humour" of the constitution, he could not legally have retained his post at the Exchequer, and the government would have fallen into a major crisis.

This same possibility threatens to repeat itself in the novel when Lord Warbeck dies and his son is poisoned, thus presumably elevating the Lord's first cousin, Sir Julius, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, into the peerage. The result by the same "grim humour" would pave the way to the Treasury for a political successor, who therefore had a strong motive

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for murdering Warbeck's son. Hare's elegant plot makes the point that this has been an essentially English crime because it presupposed a specific and unique "social and political framework." Detectives and historians alike need to take note that "a motive valid for one form of society may be totally non-existent in another." Hare would have thoroughly grasped Robin Winks's point that "the historian must be slow to read into another age the motivations of his own." Carr, de la Torre, and Tey, by contrast, tend to take too much for granted the sameness of motivation over time and place in the crimes they reconstruct.

It must be conceded that while fictional detectives want to solve problems in terms of finding out what deeds were done, social and cultural historians are characteristically more concerned with the meaning in a group's life of certain texts, rites, laws, customs, and collective attitudes. Even here, nevertheless, there is a kinship to writers such as Arthur Upfield and Tony Hillerman, whose half-Aborigine or Navajo policemen, respectively, bring their intimate personal knowledge of tribal lore to bear in finding solutions to fictional crimes, whether in Australia or New Mexico.

The popular recognition of the historian-detective analogy can be marked by the extraordinary appearance on the bestseller list in 1983 of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. The book's popularity is even more mysterious than the mystery it dramatizes, for Eco plunges his readers – along with his medieval version of Sherlock Holmes, Brother William of Baskerville – into the dense thickets of fourteenth-century history and theology, including large patches of untranslated Latin. It is a *tour de force* that is a far cry from the traditional notion of the detective story as a recreational form, what E. C. Bentley (in dedicating *Trent's Last Case* to G. K. Chesterton) called "light reading."

Cyril Hare, who had won a first in history at Oxford, tried to make his fictional solutions to crime as credible as a jury, rather than a sleepy reader, would demand, but he was never pretentious. The detective story writer might get "very near indeed to the status of a good novelist," he believed, but getting there would take place within the limiting convention of his genre: characters who exist for the sake of being detected or being suspected cannot be fully developed without revealing too much. P. D. James is much closer to Hare than to Eco, for though her well-wrought crime fiction increasingly has moral, sociological, or psychological weight, following Dorothy Sayers's path in moving their genre further towards the novel of manners, James never has forgotten her contract with the reader: "It's important the plot should stand out, that the clues should be fair."

James too has tried her hand at history, but not in the form of a

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novel. In *The Maul and the Pear Tree,* her study (with T. A. Critchley) of the Ratliffe Highway murders of 1811, which produced national panic and revulsion in England, she is scrupulously faithful to the evidence and keeps a clear historical eye on a society where the police forces were primitive and inadequate to their task. James, like Hare, has avoided Buchan's dilemma about fictionalizing history, but recently the historian Simon Schama has given cause to remind us of its peril. He created a stir with *Dead Certainties,* which includes a fictionalized history of a notorious actual nineteenth-century crime, the grisly murder of one Harvard professor by another. The partly documented drama, however, fractures the unity of the book because it is only contingently related to the book's three brilliant historical essays (on the death of General Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham, Benjamin West's famous painting of the event, and Francis Parkman's historical account of it): the murdered professor was the historian Parkman's uncle.

Schama stirred up controversy because in the case of the Harvard murder he appropriated the novelist's privilege of writing from inside the private inner consciousness of several characters who, however, are historical not fictional persons. Wallace Stegner, who has written both novels and histories, has pointed out a principle that, along with Buchan's cautionary point, should be pasted in the hats of both historians and writers of detective stories. In spite of their cousinly kinship, they should remember that while the novelist can (in T. S. Eliot's phrase) legitimately "do the police in many voices," the historian can speak only in one.

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"Doctor Nesbitt! When we said 'get ready to defend your dissertation,' we didn't mean to the death!"

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"I'm beginning to spot the cultural universals in Kung-Fu!"

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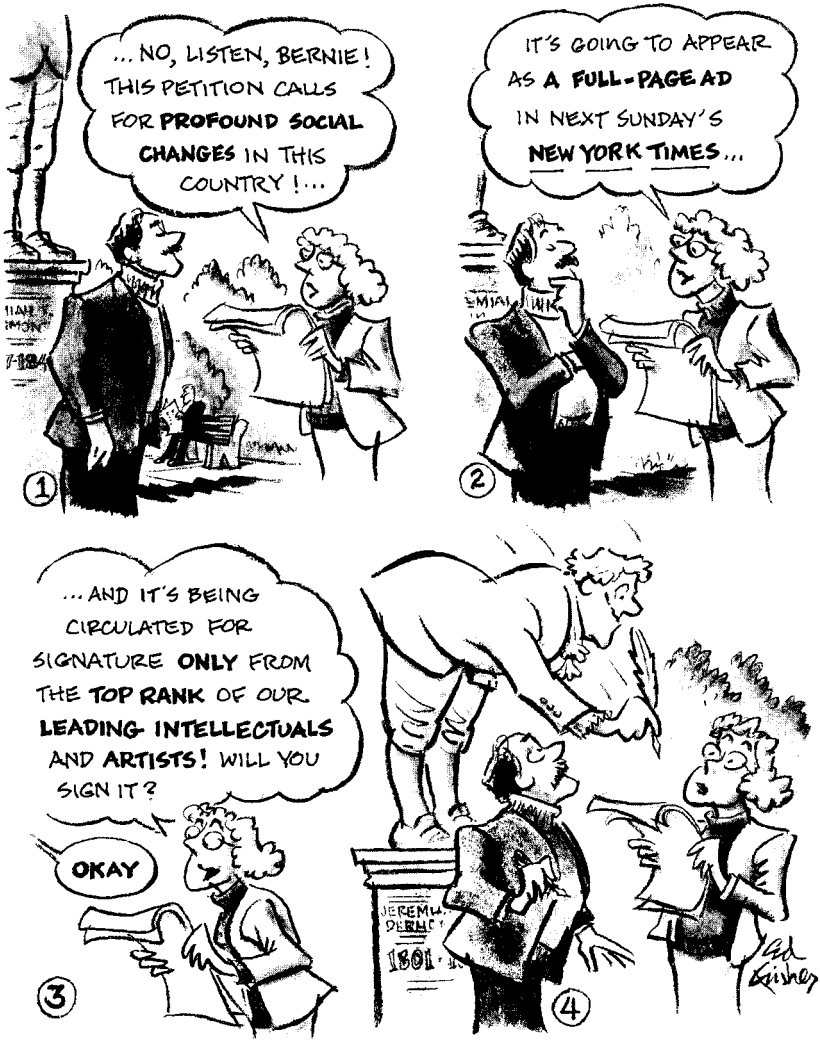
... NO, LISTEN, BERNIE! THIS PETITION CALLS FOR PROFOUND SOCIAL CHANGES IN THIS COUNTRY!...
1
IT'S GOING TO APPEAR AS A FULL-PAGE AD IN NEXT SUNDAY'S NEW YORK TIMES...
2
... AND IT'S BEING CIRCULATED FOR SIGNATURE ONLY FROM THE TOP RANK OF OUR LEADING INTELLECTUALS AND ARTISTS! WILL YOU SIGN IT?
OKAY
3
1801
4

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"Now that there's an American Poet's Corner, I guess I should stop thinking of ending up buried in Westminster Abbey."

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Fiction

ANGELA HIMSEL

Used Merchandise

Marvin points to the glass display case. Inside rest ancient seals made of brown, orange, green and yellow stones and bearing a pointed script. "Belonging to Eliashib, son of Eshayahu" is the translation. Ever Victoria's teacher, Marvin explains, "In ancient times, the purpose of placing a seal on a document was not to indicate sender but rather to confirm that the contents were untouched. Which reminds me, did I ever tell you about the Jewish woman who wasn't a virgin when she got married so she put a plastic salami wrapper in her vagina to replace her hymen?" Marvin's eyes gleam wickedly and Victoria wonders if she is being paranoid by suspecting Marvin of making a jibe at her own untouched status.

He continues, "The groom looked up his bride on their wedding night to verify her. . . you know. The next day he tells his mother, not only is she a virgin, she's stamped *kosher* by the rabbinate!" His singsong voice fluctuates at the punch line and Victoria decides Marvin has no ulterior motive in relaying the joke other than to amuse, something he does very well.

Victoria thinks Marvin is funny and loves the way he has managed to relate authenticity, doubt and proof to sex, morals and traditions. These are the subjects she has been preoccupied with for years now, which her Christian fundamentalist family in Indiana doesn't understand and her rabbi/teacher/everything-but-lover friend, Marvin, in Jerusalem, always has.

Victoria feels she should offer some amusing anecdote as they wander together through the Israel museum. "Your joke reminded me of my father. He doesn't think any of us girls should date divorced men. He calls them 'used merchandise'."

"Well," Marvin says contemplatively, "with men, you can never be sure if they've been used or not. No place to put the salami wrapper."

Victoria laughs. "Mind you," she continues, "I haven't heard him say a thing about buying second-hand cars or furniture. I guess he doesn't mind sitting on a couch that other people have farted on."

Marvin, for all his wonderful qualities (he had extensive knowledge of scarab rings and Aramaic script which Victoria had felt justified a romantic involvement years before) doesn't find flatulence to have a mystical quality. Her fascination with farts and her insistence on remaining a virgin

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until she married were things that her family would understand better than Marvin.

Marvin says the clay tablets were placed in clay envelopes, the papyrus or parchment was rolled up, tied with a string and sealed by placing soft clay on the knot and pressing these very same seals over it.

Victoria and Marvin, for the past three years, have been loyal pen pals and she is always excited to think that the letter leaves his hands in Jerusalem, travels across land and lakes, countries and continents to arrive in her hands a week later in New York City, exactly the same as when it began its journey.

Breaking open the licked envelope was tantamount to breaking a hymen. She was allowed entry into the world of another, and her connection to the sender was comparable to Buber's I-Thou relationship – a direct communication.

Marvin never understood how she could be so knowledgeable on things she had no experience of, like sex. Ariel, too, the man she had loved and left in New York, was similarly confused. Neither man understood that she believed she must save herself in order to be saved. Even though Ariel, as the son of an Orthodox cantor, said he understood her past and that their pasts were in a strange way similar, as a Jew he would never understand that were she to allow him to break open her hymen, she would close the door to her place in God's kingdom.

She and Marvin move into the weapons room. They are alone. Marvin stands Victoria in front of him, holds her shoulders and says, "Tory, I have to say it again. You really do look marvelous!"

Victoria had taken care with her appearance, his impression of her being in a way important. She wanted to show him that in three years, she had grown up, lost some of her baby fat and wasn't the cute twenty-year-old co-ed he had known.

Marvin looks the same: brown wavy hair, now speckled with gray. Glasses. Tweed jacket. Beige sweater. Brown slacks. Now, when he smiles his wide, warm smile, Tory's heart does not skip a beat, her stomach does not turn over, her bowels do not loosen, yea, verily, she is fairly calm. She remembers how drawn to him she had been when she first saw him entering the lecture hall. She had been rummaging through her daypack for a pen and her finger stabbed into a sharpened pencil. She winced, "Shit!" and triumphantly pulled the pencil out. Marvin, or Dr. Rabinowitz as she called him then, was standing at the podium. When she looked up at him, his eyes twinkled. She half smiled and he returned that overture with a broad grin.

During the lecture, he moved back and forth across the front of the auditorium as he spoke about how Biblical law differed from Mesopotamian law. When he came to a point that was close and dear to

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him, his shoulders pulled inward and up and he drew his body within himself, as if he were hugging and cherishing the Biblical concepts against his chest.

At the end of the class, Victoria slowly put her books and pencil into the daypack and slung it onto her shoulder. When all the other students had filed out, she approached him.

"Excuse me," she said politely, and he looked up from where he was gathering his notes and books. "I wanted to ask you –"

"What's your name?"

"Victoria," she said.

"Hi, Victoria," he smiled. "What did you want to ask me?"

"I wanted to ask you, um, if you could explain a little how the Biblical and Mesopotamian attitudes toward, um, the value of a human life differ?"

"We'll be discussing that in my next lecture," he said, taking the pin out of his yarmulkah and stuffing it in his pocket.

"Victoria, right?" he quirked an eyebrow in a charming way.

"Mmm hmm."

"See you next week."

"See you," she said and she knew that they had made a date.

They are looking at amulets without seeing them and Marvin says, "Will I see you again before you leave?"

"Sure," Victoria says casually. Her intestines flip over her stomach when he says, "before you leave." Yes, she must leave, go back, face everything she left behind.

"I've missed you," Marvin says softly, leaning in close. Victoria places her hand against his chest, holding him away from her. "Me too," she says, but she is being polite, saying what is expected like, "How are you?" and "Fine, thanks" even though she is not fine, she has not missed him, she is lying. But she is grateful for his attention and admiration, and being alone with him and the seals and scarabs has filled her with such ancient peace that she has forgotten, almost, her need to weep and wail and gnash teeth.

They make a date for that evening at a restaurant outside Damascus Gate.

Victoria arrives early. She had been to the Wall, stuck a note to God in one of the cracks, prayed a little, then walked through the Old City to the restaurant. The walls of the city glow golden against the Jerusalem dusk. In the morning, the streets will be crowded with Arab merchants, religious Jews going to the Wall to pray, nuns walking to the Via Dolorosa, tourists and lovers rendezvousing. All enter at the gate before going their separate ways.

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The city is sighing and settling down after a thousand and a thousand and a thousand troubled years. From a distance, one doesn't see the bullet holes in the walls or the small recesses on top of the walls from which warriors in ancient times shot their arrows and rocks and other weaponry which Victoria had seen that afternoon in the museum. No, from a distance the walls don't reveal the tumult or the turmoil within. In fact, the walls are like a crown, *keter* in Hebrew, and the crown corresponds to one of the attributes of God according to the Kabbalistic tradition.

Victoria likes to mentally review what she has learned – she gives herself pop quizzes now and then, just to stay on her toes.

Marvin arrives before she can get to the essay questions. He stretches out his hands to hers and says, "You – look – marvelous!"

"You don't look so bad yourself," Victoria teases him a little. He picks up her hand and kisses it. He is more affectionate toward her now that they aren't having an affair than he ever was three years ago.

Over a dinner of shish kabob, hummous, falafel and Turkish coffee, Marvin tells her that he is still teaching, writing articles on the Bible and lecturing. Curiosity, not jealousy, prompts her to wonder if he is still lechering his students as well.

"What about you?" he asks. "You've hardly told me anything. What are you doing? Are you seeing anyone? You must have lots of chances in New York."

Although they have exchanged a lot of information in their sealed documents, Victoria has deliberately left out that salient piece of news. She thinks it is bad manners to talk about another man to someone you were once involved with.

She swallows a sip of thick, black coffee and says, "I was."

"Tell me about it," he leans forward in his interested, please-confide-in-me-because-I-care-about-you manner.

"Well," Victoria sighs, "I was seeing someone but . . . he got married . . . to someone else."

Marvin is all sympathy as Victoria briefly relates that she met a man, Ariel, whom she liked a lot but he was seeing someone else and she wasn't ready to say yes, I'll get married and covert and have your babies so . . . . As she speaks, she wonders how much of what she is saying is truth and how much is what she wants to believe. She likes to think that if she had changed her behavior, he would not have married someone else. But what if, maybe, just maybe, he had actually wanted to marry this woman for whatever perverse reasons of his own, and nothing she could do or say would have prevented it? These suspicions have been circling in her mind the entire time she's been in Israel, but these are not things she wishes to discuss with anyone.

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Marvin's eyes and mouth betray his sympathy. He holds her hand, strokes her thumb. "You are well out of that situation. You are much too young and much too lovely to continue in a relationship that doesn't give you what you deserve. And you deserve only the best."

Victoria knows that Marvin considers himself "the best."

He continues to tell her how marvelous she is – smart, talented, beautiful, nice. She loves hearing it, needs to hear it, although she knows that Marvin, as Ariel would say, has his own agenda.

"I've missed you so," he whispers.

A nice poetic touch there, Victoria thinks. The "so." He's missed my blow jobs, she thinks, but I'm sure he's wasted no time finding a replacement.

But Marvin does like her, she knows that, and in the three years, the tears had certainly dried and the disappointment and mad crush she'd had had long since abated. She wonders if Marvin had even known that she had thought herself in love with him and that discovering that he was married had been a real shock.

Her friend Elana had said, "Victoria, are you that naive? Do you think there are any rabbis who aren't married?"

Victoria wonders now how she could have been so naive. She hopes she has outgrown that embarrassing quality. She wonders if people can ever stop being what they are, even if you find out that you shouldn't be that way, how do you stop doing something that comes so naturally? Like, how can Jews and Arabs stop hating each other, how can a person stop being Christian and start being Jewish, how can a woman start telling a man she loves him? Above all, how can she stop being pensive and giving herself pop quizzes here in Jerusalem, a place which lends itself to introspection and mystical interpretation of walls and weapons?

She is thinking of these things in Marvin's car when Marvin pulls up on Rav Berlin Street in front of Elana's flat. Marvin pulls her across the seat, takes her in his arms and kisses her. Victoria thinks, "This is weird. I tell him I'm in love with another guy and the man sticks his tongue in my mouth without even a 'by your leave'."

No. There it is – a warm, spitty tongue, moving like a fish in her surprised mouth. Later, Victoria will wonder why she didn't stop it right there. Was it that she was too polite, didn't want to hurt his feelings, not assertive enough to say, "No, thank you. I don't want to kiss you." Probably it wasn't *a, b,* or *c. All of the above* was undoubtedly the correct answer.

His teeth press against hers. She doesn't remember it being like this. She is used to Ariel's mouth – slower, fuller, sweeter.

Marvin is breathing heavily. She feels it a bit inappropriate for him to

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be breathing so heavily over so little but she realizes he is trying to convey the passion of the moment.

"What are you thinking?" he whispers.

"Nothing," she says.

I'm thinking how funny it is that you are chasing after me. Because back then I was grateful that you liked me, that you wanted to spend even a little time with me, that you let me perform oral sex on you. Thinking that I wish to God Ariel were here with me, in Jerusalem, on this dark, starry night.

Marvin holds her tightly. The scent of his aftershave infiltrates her nostrils along with the smell of pipe tobacco.

His mouth is steamy, no other way to describe it, on her neck. He is breathing very hard, throwing in a gasp here and there. One of his hands roams up her blouse and rubs her nipples. He moves back and forth rhythmically against her torso, up and down, mouth open ecstatically, and her long legs are cramped under the dashboard, but she is a good sport and says nothing. When she hears his, "Ohh, baby! Ooh, honey! Oh, God!" she rolls her eyes. His abdomen humps and bumps against her and she wonders what the hell she is doing to make him so excited. She has only touched his back and they both still have all their clothes on.

Maybe he's getting friction from the steering wheel, she thinks. He begins to yelp as if he is in severe pain. Victoria worries that someone will see them in the car and hear his screams and investigate, Marvin gasps, "I think I'm going to explode!"

"You want me to give you a hand job?" she asks.

No blow job for you, buddy, and you're only getting a hand job because I'm a good Samaritan.

"In here?" he whispers.

"Sure."

"Yes."

He unzips his pants and pulls down his underwear. Victoria picks up his penis.

Limp. She's heard of women who fake orgasms but she's never heard of a man trying to fake a hard-on. She wishes she could ponder this for a few minutes because she thinks there's a connection here, some common theme running through the day, something about how the external doesn't reveal what is contained within and you must open something up, break it open before you can truly know the contents inside but no, she can't think of this now. There is work to be done.

She pulls on Marvin's penis, it gets hard, she moves her hand up and down professionally, he comes and that is that.

Marvin takes a napkin from the glove compartment and cleans himself, looking around furtively to see if anyone has seen them. It is a quiet,

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family neighborhood. Nobody is watching out for shiksas jerking off rabbis in parked cars.

"I must tell you the funniest thing!" Marvin says. "I was teaching this course on the Bible and I used the word 'merism' which means – "

"I know – I remember." With his sticky semen on her hand, Victoria feels close to Marvin but distant enough to note that only he can effortlessly make the transition from spilling his seed to spewing out Biblical lore. "It means, 'encompassing everything.' Like, heaven and earth. Totality," she says. It is a good thing she quizzes herself every now and then.

"That's what I love about you, you know that?" he says.

Years ago, she would have swooned to hear those words.

"You really are marvelous!" he says again.

"You already told me, but I don't mind if you repeat yourself."

He kisses her hard. "Well, a student of mine came up to me and said there's no such word as merism."

"You're kidding!"

"Wait. So I said, 'Look it up in the dictionary.' She looked it up – and no merism!"

The story is coming alive, as always in his animated face as his big eyes narrow then open wide and his smile travels from cheek to cheek. He tells her the story of the mysterious merism which could not be found in any dictionary nor in the OED. So what happened? The student wrote to the Library of Congress asking about the word and they wrote back that, indeed, it does exist but is so archaic that they don't have it in their dictionary! Can you believe it? They have every word in Beowulf, but they don't have merism!"

Victoria is mystical enough to believe that the word 'merism' holds meaning for her personally, is connected to all of the rest of the stuff she's been brooding about today. In her teacher's pants and in his words, she is bringing her past and present together, the same as seals and letters bring people from opposite parts of the world together for a moment, and there is a Kabbalistic meaning there, too, with closing the circle, mending the vessel, traveling through another sphere in that long journey toward God.

"What is that sigh for?" Marvin the Mender asks.

"I think I've figured out the meaning of life," Victoria says.

They both laugh.

"I've missed you so," Marvin's eyes are serious again. "I care so much about you."

Victoria acknowledges his words with a slight smile. Marvin doesn't know her well enough to read her eyes. Her face is shouting: The irony, my darling, darling, heartbreaking love is that – and you will appreciate this since you love irony as much as you love elusive merisms – at one

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time I cared so much about you that I was willing to accept being with you for only an hour on the floor of your office, sucking you off, because I understood at some point, much later in the game, that you were married and had no more time to give me. But to be with you, next to you, holding you, was better than never having you, never holding you (oh, God, I was so young!) and so your star pupil walked you back to your office after the classes you taught on fairness and mercy and sacrificial rites and the philosophy of salvation in Judaism. Looking back, maybe I felt that if I were closer to you, I could get closer to God; Marvin, maybe you were the twentieth-century version of the temple prostitute – making love to you would bring me closer to the Deity.

"You are," Marvin says, "reckless and feckless."

"I like that," Victoria says . . ."

You like that?" he asks . . .

"Yes, it's wonderful.". . .

"Are you getting tired," he asks, " of me telling you how perfectly marvelous you are?". . .

"No, but would you mind thinking of another adjective to describe me?". . . .

"What about," he scrunches up his eyes, "jocular. Do you like that word?". . .

"I love it! Jocular. And what is jocularly pensive?" she asks. . .

"It's a – you're fantastic!" He kisses her mouth, her foot, and says, "What was that?"...

"Totality," she says. "From head to toe. A merism."

Now the irony, she continues to herself, my meristical, mystical Marvin, is that you are indignant on my behalf that Ariel has done what he has done. You even hurt for me. I love people hurting for me.

The tape cassette is playing Leonard Cohen and they hold each other in the front seat of the car, swaying back and forth to the music. Marvin sings "Suzanne" in her ear and his eloquent eyes gaze into hers and their mouths find each other. There is pleasure in kissing a man who used to mean something to you but no longer does. Distance and intimacy in one fell swoop.

"Oh, God, I can't believe I'm here with you! I feel like I'm falling in love with you all over again! Our relationship was so – so wonderful!"

Victoria wants to laugh. Ironically, of course.

"I feel so – open – and so happy when I'm with you," Marvin says.

Ariel has said something similar. Victoria thinks it is funny that men are so open and happy with her when she feels so closed and sad with them.

"You know what you taught me?" she says now. "You taught me to let go of a little of my reserve and be more warm. And you taught me not

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to always do things only because they're fair, but to be more conscious of showing mercy and forgiveness."

"I'm glad you told me that," Marvin says.

Then he kisses her again and his hands roam over her body, up and down, from the cedars of Lebanon to the streets of Ashkelon, he merisms her. Is that a word, my love? Let me know.

Two weeks later Victoria lies in her bed with Ariel. Her arms are linked around his neck, completing the circle. Nothing can possibly penetrate their aura for they are bound flesh to flesh, rib to rib; his body in hers, and his naked, hairy chest like a warm rug against her smooth breasts. They are on display to one another, not even glass walls between them.

"There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not.

"The way of the eagle in the air, the way of the serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid." Proverbs 30:18-19.

Before the emanations outward can occur, the vessel must first be broken. Victoria has no need of plastic salami wrappers. When Ariel breaks her final barrier she too, technically, becomes used merchandise. Now that he isn't hers, Victoria finds it perfectly natural to do what she has never done with any man: let him inside her. Isaac Luria, the dead mystic, would approve of this contradiction.

She binds Ariel to her, weaving his body into hers. At the moment the vessel shatters, a few of the ancient sparks in the universe are mended and Victoria and Ariel spin together in a circle in their private, separate, mystical quest for union, spiraling off of each other until they find themselves back at the beginning again, but a different beginning, for travelers journeying together inevitably arrive at a different point than the place they started. God has obviously read and responded to the letter she posted to Him at the Wall, unsigned and unsealed.

Ariel says, "I love you." And she says, "Me too."

How do you stop being reserved and Christian and pensive? How do you stop giving yourself pop quizzes in the middle of sex? How will you stop loving someone, seeing someone who is stamped with another woman's seal?

That's an essay question it will take years to answer.

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Save Biodiversity

THE DIVERSITY OF LIFE. By E. O. Wilson. Belknap Press. Harvard University Press. $29.95.

An entomologist from a Northeastern school is sitting at the edge of a rain forest in Brazilian Amazonia. It is a moonless night, the total darkness of which is broken only by flashes of lightning from an approaching thunderstorm. Although he cannot see them, he is thinking about the animals that teem all around him, ninety-nine percent of whom do not need any light to find their way. They orient themselves by chemical odors, at which they are masters and we humans idiots. But he knows that at dawn, he will get the advantage over them because when it comes to handling the audiovisual channel, they are idiots, and we humans are not just masters but geniuses. Thus we, but not they, are graced with the evolutionary prerequisite for intelligence, thanks to which he, not the teeming bugs, can reflect on such matters as Amazon nights and sensory modalities. He is glad to hear the distant rumble of a jetliner, ten thousand meters up; back home, it would be an irritant, but here, in the lonely rain forest, he finds it a comforting sign of the continuance of his own species.

Thus begins *The Diversity of Life* by Harvard University's Professor Edward O. Wilson, who has joined the environmentalist campaign to save mankind from itself. Wilson's particular concern is the conservation of the vast panoply of multifarious creatures with which organic evolution has endowed Earth. He purports to present a reasoned, rather than a romantic, justification for a Save-the-Biodiversity Crusade, couched in environmentalist, pragmatic and ethical arguments. But the evolutionism of *The Biodiversity of Life* is not state of the art. Its pragmatism is incoherent, and its ethics are short on philosophic merit.

Wilson is generally considered by biologists to be one of the greatest living authorities on social insects. His name became widely known to the general public upon the appearance in 1976 of his *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, not so much for his authoritative account of insect societies as for the verbal and physical abuse to which he was subjected by Marxist political activists. He had aroused their wrath by proposing in the last chapter of *Sociobiology* the idea that the evolutionary Darwinian provenance of genetic determination in insect societies had some relevance also for human society. Wilson, so his adversaries alleged, was justifying the inequities of bourgeois-capitalism by implying – contrary to the allegation made by Mary Colum in a conversation with Ernest Hemingway, that the

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only difference between the rich and other people is that the rich have more money – there is also a difference in their genes. The attacks by political demagogues aside, Wilson's last chapter did have serious conceptual flaws, especially from the viewpoint of moral and political philosophy.

This time, Wilson ought to be safe from abuse. Marxists have become an endangered sub-subspecies of *Home sapiens americanus,* and their neoconservative successors, who ought to be irritated by Wilson's politically correct anti-business environmentalism, may lack the fervor to attack him, because, like a true-blue *ancien régime* conservative, he pronounces in favor of maintaining the world as we know it. Why should Wilson welcome the jetliner's rumble in remotest Amazonia as a sign of the continuance of his species? Because, he says, he is obsessed with the biohistorical fact that, after some kinds of plants and animals had become dominant and spread over large parts of the world, they were driven back until they became rare and, in many cases, extinct. Is *Homo sapiens* one of those hegemonic species that may be on its way to extinction? Affirmative; and as an historically well-nigh unique instance of *self-extinction* to boot, unless people change their reckless, unethical lifestyle vis-à-vis nature.

It would be cavil to dispute Wilson's proposition that the creation of biodiversity came slow and hard: It took three billion years of organic evolution to begin the profusion of animals that occupy the seas and another three hundred million years to assemble the rain forests in which half or more of the species on Earth now live. He is also on safe grounds when he reminds his readers that modern fauna and flora are composed of survivor species which somehow managed to dodge and weave through all the extinctions of geological history. But his assertion that ninety-nine percent of all the species that ever lived are now extinct – just as his assertion that ninety-nine percent of all animals in the Amazonian rain forest orient by smell – reflects his free and easy ways with numbers. It would follow from his own claims about how we do not even know how many species are alive today – not even to the nearest order of magnitude – that for him "ninety-nine percent" is just a figure of speech, not a scientific datum.

Wilson provides an account of seven mass extinctions in the history of life, of which the penultimate, (probably) set off by the impact of a giant meteorite sixty-five million years ago, ended the Age of the Reptiles and ushered in the Reign of the Mammals. According to Wilson, the last and seventh mass extinction is going on at this very moment, (certainly) set off by one of the few mistakes Nature made in the course of evolution when, a couple of million years ago, she put the genus *Homo* on the biodiversity scene. How did "Mother Earth" manage to recover from each of the earlier six mass extinctions? Wilson says she could do it only thanks

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to her vast reservoir of biodiversity, although each extinction left dramatic changes in the relative abundances of different kinds of creatures in its wake. But according to him, the seventh, anthropogenic mass extinction is so brutal and its impoverishment of biodiversity so severe that with each passing moment the environment is destablized more and more. It is simply reckless, says Wilson, to suppose that biodiversity can be diminished indefinitely without threatening humanity itself. Who are these reckless people? Is there anyone who supposes that humanity would not be threatened when the indefinite diminution of biodiversity has reached the point at which *Homo sapiens* remains the lone voyager on Spaceship Earth?

The bulk of *The Diversity of Life* is dedicated to arguing that the call for mankind to make the preservation of biodiversity its paramount telos is actually grounded in more than apocalyptic prophecy and environmental platitudes. One part of the brief is descriptive. It presents a synchronic survey of a colorful palette of extant creatures, great and small, and their intricately interwoven, complex ecosystems, as well as a diachronic record of the evolutionary development of the species. According to Wilson, biodiversity was ever-waxing until the genus *Homo* "walked upright onto the stage, bearing Promethean fire – self awareness and knowledge taken from the gods – and everything changed."

The second part of the brief is analytical in intent, addressed to questions of the evolutionary mechanisms responsible for, and the practical benefits derivable from, biodiversity. Here Wilson's descriptive skills do not suffice for presenting the authoritative treatment readers have the right to expect from an expert. He does acknowledge frankly his awareness of the enormous complexities and conceptual quicksands of the subject, yet he does not deal with them in a logically coherent mode or with enough sophistication.

By insisting on identifying the "biological species" (i.e., "a population whose members are able to interbreed freely under natural conditions") as the "fundamental natural unit" in terms of which the world of organisms has to be fathomed, Wilson entangles himself (and his readers) in the evolutionary donnybrooks of yesteryear. For if there is one overarching lesson that latter-day molecular biology has provided for the students of systematics and evolution, it is that the fundamental natural unit at the organismal level is the *genome,* the set of homologous DNA nucleotide base sequences with which organisms of common descent are endowed. (Throughout his book, Wilson incorrectly alludes to such sequences as "genetic codes," a term by which the molecular biologists who made it up mean the symbolic relation between a particular nucleotide base triplet and the protein amino acid it represents.)

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The paramount latter-day focus on genomes does not signify that the biological species concept has lost its utility; it remains a handy way for categorizing those sexually reproducing creatures to which it is applicable – obviously Wilson cannot carry a DNA nucleotide base sequencer with him to the Amazon rain forest for classifying all the bugs he runs into. But by now it should be evident to one and all that the central problem of evolutionary biology is the origin of the genomes, which we know now to be responsible for the phenomenon that was one of mankind's earliest scientific observations, namely that among living creatures, like begets like. Some genomes give rise to creatures that propagate by sexual reproduction and may therefore be usefully classified under the biological species concept. They happened to be of paramount interest to Darwin, but in the context of contemporary evolutionism, the generation of biological species is merely a special (not to say, anthropocentric) wrinkle in the much larger problem of the origin of biodiversity, with which Wilson says he is concerned.

Curiously, although Wilson champions the biological species concept, he meekly accepts Michael Ghiselin's bizarre claim that biological species are *individuals,* rather than sets (or classes) of organisms. This claim has no merit, since it is based on a misunderstanding (shared by Wilson) of the nature of worldly, as opposed to mathematical, sets As Wittgenstein pointed out long ago, most sets that we recognize by naming them, e.g., "chairs" or "games," are *open,* in that we cannot unambiguously specify necessary or sufficient criteria for their membership. In any case, Wilson, like almost all species-are-individuals bamboozlees, continues to speak – he cannot do otherwise – of species as sets (or "populations") of individual organisms.

According to Wilson, it is absolutely essential for us to find out how far along we are in our ever-escalating rush through this seventh, and maybe final, anthropogenic mass extinction. He says that he cannot imagine a scientific project of greater immediate importance to humanity than assessing how much biodiversity there still is left as one species after another falls by the wayside. What is so important about biodiversity? It is "our most valuable but least appreciated resource," because it can safely be assumed that there exists a vast array of unknown species that we can put to good use. "A rare beetle sitting on an orchid in a remote valley of the Andes might secrete a substance that cures pancreatic cancer. A grass down to twenty plants in Somalia could provide green coverage and forage for the saline deserts of the world . . . Salvaged species can help to revitalize timbering, agriculture, medicine and other industries located elsewhere . . ." Then there is our modern diet which unresourcefully still depends on the tiresome and inefficient plant species discovered and culti-

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vated by our Neolithic ancestors, when we could be feasting on a "one-species supermarket," by planting the winged bean of New Guinea, which can provide ersatz for hamburgers, buns, French fries, and coffee, requiring no fertilizer because it fixes atmospheric nitrogen.

As for animal husbandry, for the past ten thousand years, "we've been stuck with the same narrow range of ungulate mammals, horses, cattle, donkeys, camels, pigs and goats . . . often spectacularly destructive of the natural environment." Wilson thinks that if we had any sense, we would cultivate the giant Amazon River turtle, which reaches a length of nearly a meter and a weight of fifty kilograms. Or the "chicken of the trees," the green iguana, which "has been favored as a delicacy for centuries by farmers in the humid regions of Central and South America."

But would not the medical researcher who extends people's life expectancy by finding a cure for cancer just be part of the problem? According to Wilson: "Human demographic success has brought the world to this crisis of biodiversity. Human beings . . . have become a hundred more times numerous than any other land animal of comparable size in the history of life. By every conceivable measure, humanity is ecologically abnormal."

And as for the greening desert, planting the one-species supermarket or raising chickens in trees, does not Wilson himself caution against moving species hither and thither? He provides many examples to show that, in view of the complexity of the ecological situation, you never know ahead of time what is going to happen. Take the case of the giant Nile perch, which reaches a length of two meters and a weight of one hundred-eighty kilograms, thus beating even the giant Amazon River turtle. According to Wilson, this "elephant of the water" was introduced into Lake Victoria, upstream from its normal habitat, as a game fish, either by "Ugandan officials in the 1920s" or by "British colonists in 1959" where it flourished. But this good idea seems to have gone sour because "in 1985, a task force of fish biologists observed, 'Never before has man in a single ill-advised step placed so many vertebrate species simultaneously at risk for extinction and also, in doing so, threatened a food resource and traditional way of life for riparian dwellers.'"

As Wilson is heading home from his camp at the edge of the Amazonian rain forest, he wonders, "Why should we care? What difference does it make if some species are extinguished, if even half of all the species on earth disappear?" Why is he wondering? Doesn't he remember the pragmatic argument he worked out before he got on the truck, namely that the call for preservation of biodiversity at all costs is justified by the tremendous benefits likely to accrue from it? It is just that the sight of the remnants of the ravaged forest inspires him to develop a supplementary, spiritual argument, by laying the foundations for an

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"environmental ethic." He derives this ethic on naturalistic, rather than metaphysical, grounds, just as he did for a morality of social behavior in the notorious final chapter of *Sociobiology*.

Wilson now argues that we have little grasp of our true nature; know not what it is to be human; are deluding ourselves that we can flourish apart from the rest of the living world – all because we are ignorant of our origins. The more closely we identify ourselves with the rest of life, the more quickly we will be able to discover the sources of our emotions, which are what makes us people and not computers. In fact, Wilson has discovered these sources, by developing "biophilia," an early-Freudian-Jungian bio-psychoanalytic approach to human emotions, which explains how evolution endowed people with phobias that make them innately afraid of threats encountered in natural environments but not of unnatural threats posed by recently developed devices, such as guns and knives; with obsessions with snakes, even if they may have never seen any in nature; with preferences for living near water at sites from which a parkland can be viewed; and with yens for backpacking, hunting, fishing, birdwatching and gardening. On the basis of these deep insights into human nature, Wilson derives a biophilial ethical imperative: "We should judge every scrap of biodiversity as priceless while we learn to use it and come to understand what it means to humanity. We should not knowingly allow any species or race to go extinct!"

Maybe there is no reason to get all worked up over the appearance of one more woolly paen to environmentalism, even though it is authored by a distinguished biologist. After all, there seems little chance that the mind-boggling, open-ended crash-program of taking a global inventory of what's left out there in the way of different kinds of creatures will ever be implemented on the scale demanded by Wilson. Yet there is an ominous aspect to this kind of book: In its 400-odd pages, I was unable to find one kind word about mankind, which is mentioned only as an unmitigated natural disaster. Never mind the religious, philosophical, artistic, scientific and technological achievements with which mankind has enriched the world – not to speak of developing the concept of moral responsibility in the first place. To Wilson, these achievements do not seem worth recalling while the awesome seventh, and probably final, mass extinction of biodiversity is going on unchecked.

Due to my German-Jewish origins, I am peculiarly sensitive to the paradoxical affective disorder of self-hatred, and I have no trouble recognizing its manifestations in this book. The self-hatred that afflicts members of persecuted racial, ethnic or religious minorities is a well-known phenomenon of long standing. But hatred of one's own biological species, of which there are indications in the environmentalist movement, must

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be a more recent and undiagnosed condition. While some teachers and parents are working hard to liberate minority children from the bigot-inspired ethnic self-hatred that impairs their development into emotionally hale people, others are already at work laying on majority kids an egghead-inspired species self-hatred.

GUNTHER STENT

Nicaraguan Conflicts

THE CIVIL WAR IN NICARAGUA: INSIDE THE SANDINISTAS. By Roger Miranda and William Ratliff. Transaction Publishers. $34.95.

The Nicaraguan civil war of the 1980s was among the most controversial chapters of the late twentiethth century, with ramifications of special importance for the United States. It came close to the Vietnam War in provoking sharp divisions of opinion among both the public and policy makers. Along with Afghanistan's civil war, it was the last major Cold War confrontation between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union. Yet notwithstanding the passionate intensity of these debates during the 1980s, by the early 1990s – with the civil war over and the Sandinistas (seemingly) out of power – Americans, whatever their political persuasion, had ceased to pay attention to Nicaragua and its problems.

From an historical point of view, the Sandinista regime represented the last attempt to install and perpetuate a pro-Soviet, pro-Cuban state socialist system. Unbeknownst to American opinion-makers and the general public, the Sandinista affinity for such systems was long-standing, reaching back to the 1950s when one of the leaders, Carlos Fonseca, visited the Soviet Union and returned deeply impressed. Yet the Sandinistas were perceived by their numerous sympathizers abroad as exactly the opposite: that is, as trying to create a humane socialist system uncontaminated by the Soviet example.

The Sandinista government also offers a case study in the exceptionally rapid corruption of a revolutionary political elite. It was one of the new generation of Communist regimes (along with those in Afghanistan,

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Angola, Ethiopia and Mozambique) which stimulated powerful opposition by guerrilla movements composed mostly of poor peasants – a state of affairs which foreign supporters, who preferred to think of the contra guerrillas as American mercenaries and former Somoza henchmen, vigorously denied. The Sandinista government was one of the rare communist systems that allowed itself to be voted out of power, although more as a matter of miscalculation than as an embrace of democratic electoral principles.

Nicaragua was the last Communist state upon which Westerners could project sentiments and wishes which at earlier times had been reserved for the Soviet Union, Mao's China, Castro's Cuba, and Communist Vietnam and other third world countries. The Sandinistas were singularly adept at appealing to the predispositions and hopes of alienated and idealistic Westerners (especially Americans) looking for alternatives to the social injustice, the lack of purpose and community they experienced in their own society. As a result the Nicaraguan regime was the beneficiary of a huge lobbying effort in the U.S. that included congressmen, journalists, the clergy, and groups on campuses. The Sandinistas also received substantial economic and humanitarian assistance from several Western European countries. According to the authors of *Inside the Sandinistas*, "No one explained the Sandinistan policy of deception more clearly than Bayardo Arce in what was supposed to be a secret speech in May 1984. . . . Arce concluded with the ultimate irony: the Sandinistas will so confuse the imperialists that Nicaragua will prove to be the world's 'first experience of building socialism with the dollars of capitalism'." These policies of deception were formulated at the very beginning of the revolution in 1979 and enshrined in the so-called "seventy-two-hour document" that resulted from two secret seventy-two-hour meetings.

Even compared to what the Americans knew or believed about other Communist systems, the volume of misinformation about the Nicaraguan system was staggering. This was all the more remarkable since tens of thousands of Americans had visited Nicaragua during the 1980s, proving once more that predisposition and selective perception effortlessly overcome proximity and opportunity for genuine information gathering.

Roger Miranda and William Ratliff have brought unusual qualifications to their study, published in YEAR. Miranda joined the Sandinista movement in 1969, was chief of the Sandinista Defense Ministry Secretariat from 1982 until 1987, and top aide to Defense Minister and Comandante Humberto Ortega. He was among the handful of insiders who attended meetings of the National Directorate and had access to confidential information. William Ratliff, a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution and an expert on Cuba and Latin American affairs,

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interviewed key figures in Nicaraguan and Central American politics such as Eden Pastora (the anti-Somoza guerrilla leader who turned against the Sandinistas); Moises Hassas (a member of the first Sandinista junta); as well as superpower representatives such as George Schultz; Charles Hill (former chief of staff in the State Department); Thomas Enders (former Assistant Secretary of State); John Gavin (U. S. Ambassador to Mexico during the early years of the Sandinista regime); Roger Fontaine (National Security Council Latin American specialist); Yuri Povlov (former head of the Latin America Department in the Soviet Foreign Ministry); and Eduard Shevardnadze.

This book seriously undermines several tenacious American myths about Nicaragua. Perhaps the most intensely embraced was that following the revolution of 1979 Nicaragua came to be governed by a group of young idealists whose only desire was to uplift the masses, introduce political democracy, establish independence from the superpowers and steer clear of dogmatic Marxism (or any kind of Marxism). Miranda recalls that as early as 1969, he (and his comrades in the movement) read Marx, Castro and Mao's Little Red Book "which became the militants' pocket Bible." Thus Humberto Ortega stated that "to be a good Marxist you have to be a good Sandinista and to be a good Sandinista you have to be a good Marxist." But as the authors explain, "the Sandinista version of Marxism provided an intellectual framework for anti-American views already held."

It was widely believed in the United States that the economic difficulties of Nicaragua were caused entirely by the policies of the United States, in particular the guerrilla war and the economic embargo. While the war was an obvious drain on the economy, arguably the mismanagement and wrongheaded economic policies of the government were far more consequential. About Nicaragua's economy, an East German economist in 1985 observed "I can't think of any East European economy as messed up as this one." A more substantial criticism of Nicaragua came from the official Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* in 1989:

> Ambitious and obviously unfeasible long-term projects . . . excessive centralization of management, the wave of confiscations which scared off private entrepreneurs, corruption among state functionaries, ineffective use of foreign aid, and poor discipline at state enterprises – all this produced serious disruptions in the economy. The rest was accomplished by war.

It was also widely held that the United States fomented the civil war relying on the remnants of the Somoza regime, especially its former mili-

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tary (the national guard), and that the guerrillas had little popular support. In fact

> . . . the first significant "Contra" military attacks were carried out by frustrated Sandinistas under the leadership of Pedro Joaquin Gonzales, not by or under former guardsmen. And while it is true that former national guardsmen played a major role in founding and leading the Honduras-run FDN, the maximum number of guardsmen in the contras was only about four hundred . . . and this four hundred included far more soldiers than officers . . . peasants. . . were the overwhelming majority of the Contras . . .

In the American media and in academic writings it was often said that Nicaragua (just like Cuba) was "pushed into the arms" of the Soviet Union by the misguided policies and relentless hostility of the United States. To the contrary, the authors argue, "the most important thing the Sandinistas shared with Fidel Castro and cultivated under his direct and indirect influence was his bitter anti-American sentiment . . . ."

American idealists supported the Sandinistas because of their conviction that they were deeply committed to egalitarian policies. Evidence to the contrary was either unavailable or ignored, including the predilection of the Sandinista leaders for Mercedes cars and their expropriation of the luxurious homes of the rich immediately after taking power in 1979:

> After July 1979 all sorts of property throughout the country . . . became war booty . . . distributed according to power and prestige within the Sandinista movement. An enormous horde of riches was left by the Somozas and their closest friends . . . Almost all of it fell into the hands of high members of the FSLN, especially the nine commandantes . . .

Following the loss of power after the 1990 election, one Mexican journalist estimated that the Sandinistas took over some $700 million in state property that included automobiles, radio transmitters, shops, factories, hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, huge ranches, amusement parks, and export-import businesses, among other things.

Miranda and Ratliff also detail the assistance the Sandinistas rendered to other Latin American guerrillas, especially in the neighboring countries of El Salvador and Guatemala – a policy that was stubbornly denied and fervently disputed by their supporters abroad. In fact, Managua provided hospitality to representatives and organizers of the guerrilla movements in Argentina, Columbia, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Uruguay and oth-

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ers. The Salvadoran guerrillas' radio station, which supposedly transmitted from El Salvador, was housed in Managua "only meters from the home of foreign minister D'Escoto."

Although correctly seen as (in part) a conflict between the United States and the former Soviet Union, there was little awareness in the United States of how much more support the U.S.S.R. rendered than did the United States. While the Soviet Union and its allies (especially Cuba) sent thousands of military advisers, trained Nicaraguans in their own countries, and provided hundreds of tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces, planes, attack helicopters, patrol boats and virtually limitless quantities of small arms, American help to the contras was halting, unpredictable and far more limited. There were no American advisors in the field (although there was a handful of anti-Castro Cubans) and no offers to train the Nicaraguans here.

American supporters of the Sandinistas believed that they lost the 1990 election because of American threats and pressures. In reality they lost because of their misguided, doctrinaire policies, some of them astonishingly similar to the discredited Soviet ones. For example, state controls over agricultural production and over the price of produce (plus the collectivization of a substantial part of agriculture) resembled earlier Soviet policies and so did the results: peasants stopped growing food and flocked to the cities. And the resentment which human rights violations by the authorities created should not be underestimated among the sources of dissatisfaction with the system, particularly since the Sandinista State Security, modeled after the Cuban one, was ten times the size of the corresponding Somocistia police force. Under these circumstances it was not surprising that in 1990 the people took the first opportunity they had to get rid of the government.

It would have been useful if Miranda and Ratliff had added a bibliography in addition to end-of-chapter notes, and a list of abbreviations would have saved the reader from going back to the page where an acronym was first used and explained. The authors do not always make clear what sources were used even when statements are quoted, nor do we always know what parts of the information presented are based on Miranda's witness while he belonged to the Sandinista apparatus. Such reservations notwithstanding, *The Civil War in Nicaragua* is a major contribution to what may be called the "revisionist" history of the Nicaraguan civil war and the Sandinista regime.

PAUL HOLLANDER

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The Uses of the Holocaust

PERPETRATORS,VICTIMS, BYSTANDERS: THE JEWISH CATASTROPHE, 1933-1945. By Raul Hilberg. HarperCollins/Aaron Asher Books. $25.00.

PROBING THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION: NAZISM AND THE FINAL SOLUTION. Edited by Saul Friedlander. Harvard University Press. $49.95.

"The history of the Holocaust sits uneasily amidst other events of its time," Michael Marrus wrote in *The Holocaust and the Historians*. "How do we write Holocaust history? Since by writing it, we automatically locate it within some tradition, some epoch, how do we choose one? Is it only Jewish history? Or German? Is it European or more generally Western?" To which we might add, is it part of World War Two history, or in the words of another historian, Lucy Dawidowicz, a separate "war against the Jews"? Do we tell it from the perspective of the perpetrators, the victims, or the bystanders? As becomes so very clear in the two new works under review here, every telling creates a variant Holocaust. Only together do they begin to constitute a total history of events.

After his landmark, three-volume history of the Holocaust (*The Destruction of the European Jews,* 1966, revised and enlarged in 1986), many wondered what else Raul Hilberg could have to say about the catastrophe. In its exhaustive plunge into documents, its breadth, its girth, Hilberg's first work seemed to suggest itself as the last word. While some have faulted its somewhat bloodless preoccupation with German train schedules, or its slavish devotion to the Germans' own massive archives, it is still regarded as a standard work in the field. By contrast, his new book, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders,* seems designed precisely to counter any notion of a single version of the Holocaust.

Toward this end, Hilberg calls the twenty-four chapters in this book "modules," each self-contained and, he says, readable in any order. While these are organized in one of three sections on perpetrators, victims, or bystanders, none is to be read as representative of the whole, just as none of the three sections alone constitutes the whole of Holocaust history. Instead of train schedules, Hilberg turns to the more personal documents of the perpetrators, victims and bystanders. In his words, he has set out to illustrate the prevailing attitudes and trends among all the various participants of the Holocaust in a series of exemplary biographical sketches. Functionaries now have names and faces, birthdates and voices. "Lutz Graf Schwerin von Kroigk was such a man, " Hilberg writes. And then

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he goes on to outline his law education, his Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford, his service on the front in World War One, and his Iron Cross. This was the coming of age of a man who eventually ran the ministry that confiscated the property of Jews after their forced emigration.

Despite the book's deliberately understated monotone, Hilberg is not above titillating the reader with suggestively loose threads. At the end of several paragraphs on Adolf Hitler, for example, Hilberg concludes with the possibility that Hitler's mother had a Jewish doctor, that his art dealer was Jewish, and that the Lieutenant who recommended Hitler for an Iron Cross was a Jew. Without saying so, Hilberg implies that throughout his early life, Hitler was steadfastly enabled by Jews. All of which works to make his first explicitly anti-Semitic writings in 1919 seem that much more grotesque.

By opening his sections on "victims" with the Jewish Councils, Hilberg suggests at least two important points: first, that the Councils themselves were also victims of the Germans, of the very circumstances in which they found themselves, even of their own traditional blindness. At the same time, however, they were also the mediators between the killers and the masses of Jews they oversaw. This is important when one considers Hilberg's less sympathetic approach to the Councils in his first book. However, by the time we finish reading his short portraits of the various Jewish Council leaders, and his summary of those leaders who resisted cooperation with the Germans, it's still very clear that Hilberg would have history judge the *Judenräte* harshly – even as we keep in mind their relative lack of choices.

In another especially moving section, Hilberg includes refugees among the victims. Though he spends much space enumerating and describing the most prominent of the (primarily German-Jewish) refugees before the war, he reminds us that the vast majority of refugees were all too unprominent, average workaday Jews with nowhere to turn – and so bore the trauma of an unwanted move and immersion in new and foreign cultures less well than their more privileged counterparts.

In a less touching section on "victims," Hilberg subsumes "resistance" under the category of behaviors characterized by those who were "the unadjusted" – lumped together with the suicides, those who hid out, and those who escaped. As one of many historians who finds Jewish resistance during the Holocaust to be remembered out of proportion to its actual scale, Hilberg is unapologetic here. And because most of the Jewish resistance was, in fact, wiped out and its fighters either killed in battle or captured and murdered like the rest of their mostly defenseless comrades, Hilberg is not completely misguided. Yet this may not justify the short shrift he gives to the Ghetto uprisings here. Of the various personalities he

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might have colored in, surely Mordechai Anielewicz – the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – or one of his deputies (e.g., Yitzchak "Antek" Zuckerman or Marek Edelman) was worthy of a paragraph. Precisely because they have been mythologized as heroes, Hilberg might have restored them to the human realm.

Finally, Hilberg opens his concluding section on "bystanders" by noting wisely that even those who saw what was happening to their Jewish neighbors were absorbed by their own preoccupations during the war. "The Dutch were worried about their bicycles, the French about shortages, the Ukrainians about food, the Germans about air raids," Hilberg writes. "All of these people thought of themselves as victims, be it of war, or oppression, or 'fate'." Even so, his examples do not let the bystanders off the hook completely. Nor do Jewish would-be rescuers get off very lightly, especially given their deadly equivocating during the war in the face of eye-witness reports coming out of the camps by escapees like Rudolf Vrba and underground messengers like Jan Karski. Saul Friedlander's phrase, "the ambiguity of good," is given full expression in Hilberg's own discussion of helpers and messengers.

Friedlander has has been widely revered for his powerful and self-revelatory memoir, *When Memory Comes* (1978); now he has assembled the proceedings of a mammoth conference he organized at UCLA into a weighty volume, devoted to the theoretical limits and possibilities of Holocaust representation. Dozens of distinguished speakers gathered from around the world, most of them in Friedlander's words "not the usual interlocutors in discussions of the Holocaust."

Though painfully aware of the potential unseemliness in turning the Holocaust into so much grist for theoretical mills, however inadvertently, Friedlander also writes that he could not ignore the essential conundrum at the heart of any historian's enterprise: the need to establish a stable truth of events in a decidedly unstable literary medium. He takes as his starting point the debate between Hayden White and Carlo Ginzburg. White has argued long and persuasively that insofar as historical texts are subject to the vagaries and indeterminacy of narrative, literary metaphor and the conventions of emplotment, they cannot establish perfectly objective, universally true history. Ginzburg vehemently rejects this view of history, arguing passionately against the kind of historical relativism it breeds, especially if it fails to distinguish between "true interpretation and lies." White rejoins that he is not arguing for a history that blurs the distinction between real events and imaginary ones, or that allows one to deny that events have taken place at all. Rather, he believes that "when it comes to apprehending the historical record, there are no grounds to be found in the historical record itself for preferring one way of construing its

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meaning over another." Ginzburg answers (in Friedlander's paraphrase) "that even the voice of one single witness gives us some access to the domain of historical reality, allows us to get nearer to some historical truth." Carlo Ginzburg first seeks to taint White's argument with what he regards as fascist theoretical antecedents, and he tries to sustain his attack through a series of neological leaps, as unlikely as they are breathtaking. A putative *coup de grace* comes with his conclusion that if taken to its logical extension, White's argument would finally have to regard even the narrative of Holocaust negationist Robert Faurisson as true. As deftly written and rhetorically persuasive as it is, Ginzburg's essay is not a pretty thing to behold.

Throughout his own illuminating essay, it becomes apparent that Friedlander himself is torn between what he knows as an academic historian, as a critic of historical narrative, and what he feels must be made explicitly clear: the absolute facticity of these events. He is torn between the necessary breach dividing history as it happened and history as it is told. Finally, he is also torn between his scholarly obligations to the rigorously scientific, occasionally ponderous working-through of these issues and his own strong impulse to de-mystify the Holocaust through lucid and accessible narratives like *When Memory Comes*.

While most essays that follow tend toward the ponderous side of this equation, several of these are also elegantly written and conceived. The contributions by Christopher Browning, John Felstiner, and Geoffrey Hartman offer themselves as models of lucidity and brilliant insight, intellectual rigor and accessibility. After introducing his essay with a chilling description of events from the German Reserve Police Battalion 101's bloody part in the Final Solution, Browning proceeds to examine how and why he has told history this way, what consequences for understanding this kind of history holds for us. To this end, he examines both the necessity and repulsiveness of "perpetrator history," what it means to descend into the psychologies and everyday lives of the killers – not as a singular alternative to the victims' history, but as a complement to it, all toward a fuller history of events.

Likewise, the meditations by Felstiner and Hartman lay out in clear-eyed prose the daunting difficulties, the multiple ambiguities and complexities of Felstiner's translation of Paul Celan's masterpiece, "Todesfuge," and Hartman's attempt to add to the "Book of Destruction." By walking us through the myriad choices a translator faces, each one an interpretive act, Felstiner offers an eloquent model of critical self-reflexivity, even as he makes and stands by his own choices. Hartman's own essay on "The Book of Destruction" closes the volume with an erudite and sparkling reflection on the very possibility of such

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writing, its place (or placelessness) in postmodern culture. "We want to say," Hartman writes, "'It is inconceivable,' yet we know it was conceived and acted upon systematically. We continue to harbor, therefore, a sense of improbability, not because there is any doubt whatsoever about the Shoah as fact but because what we lived through, or what we have learned about, cannot be part of us: the mind rejects it, casts it out – or it casts out the mind."

This kind of history-telling has both immense rewards and risks. By returning these horrible events to the human times and places in which they occurred, such history becomes humanly, if not divinely, accountable. At the same time, this kind of writing suggests that we, and no one else, are also accountable for both the histories we write and the conclusions we draw from them.

JAMES E. YOUNG

Poetic Images

CORRIDOR. By Jonathan Aaron. Wesleyan/University Press of New England. $22.50.
THE NIGHT WORLD AND THE WORLD NIGHT. By Franz Wright. Carnegie-Mellon University Press. $16.95.
CANVAS. By Adam Zagajewski. Translated by Renata Gorczynski, Benjamin Ivry and C. K. Williams. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $20.00.

Most likely, where twentieth century poetry has excelled is in its use of imagery. In no other century, no other literature of the past, has image been so important. In an age of ideology and advertisement, the poet trusts the eye more than the ear. There are small truths of individual images, as it were, but not one great truth. Metaphysically, the modern poets are still with the Pre-Socratic philosophers. Every poetic images asks why is there something rather than nothing as it renews our astonishment at the way things exist. Much of the pleasure of reading these three poets comes from the way in which they think with their images.

Franz Wright has published six previous collections of poetry. These are short books, and for a very good reason. Wright is a perfectionist, and he writes short poems. His new book has poems that run to a page and a half, but his sensibility is still that of a miniaturist for whom conciseness is synonomous with poetry. It occurs to me reading Wright that his secret ambition is to write an epic on the inside of a matchbook cover. Here is a line of his that for me, at least, suggests an endless story:

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You get a little doll that looks like you

Wright is a visionary collagist. His poems depend on juxtaposition and an aesthetic of surprise. Their voice is both personal and anonymous. He works off the long lyric tradition that goes back to Catullus and includes a recent poet like Frank O'Hara. With their compactness and their reliance on imagery, Wright's poems go against today's trend which favors longish narrative and more literal approaches. He quotes Keats's phrase, "the reality of the imagination" as an epigraph and that seems right. That paradox is his subject too. What Wright brings to the equation is his tragic sense of life.

There are a number of fine poems in his new book, but this untitled one may be one of the best:

> This was the first time I knelt
> and with my lips, frightened, kissed
> the lit inwardly pink petaled lips.
>
> It was like touching a bird's exposed heart
> with your tongue.
>
> Summer dawn flowing into the room parting the
> curtains – the lamp dimming – breeze
>
> rendered visible. Lighting,
> and then soft applause
> from the leaves. . .
>
> Almost children, we lay asleep in love listening to
> the rain.
> We didn't ask to be born.

Jonathan Aaron's first book of poems was called "Second Sight" and came out to much praise in 1982. His new one is more ambitious, more complex and original. Reading his poems one is reminded of a tradition of wonderful misfits in literature, unclassifiable writers like Henri Michaux and Bruno Schulz, anti-poets suspicious of literature who are at the same time its most dependent addicts. Only a style which is a carnival of styles seems to please them. That's our poet too.

I always liked poems that have a feel of the circus in them, a bit of the sideshow, vaudeville, fabulous creature, facts stranger than fiction, crazes, superstitions and fake miracles, like this opening of Aaron's "Dance Mania":

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In 1027, not far from Berburg,
eighteen peasants were seized
by a common delusion.
Holding hands, they circled for hours
in a churchyard, haunted by visions,
spirits whose names they called in terror or welcome,
until an angered priest cast a spell on them
for disrupting his Christmas service,
and they sank into the frozen earth
up to their knees. In 1227
on a road to Darmstadt, scores of children
danced and jumped in shared delirium.
Some saw devils, others the Savior enthroned
in the open heavens. Those who survived
remained palsied for the rest of their days. . .

Here's a poem in which one is entertained, dazzled, left incredulous by the story – and that's only the beginning! There's more going on here. Memory, dreams, movies, history, myth intermingle to give Aaron's poems their texture. I admire the way he joins these disparate elements together. He is a magical realist, a Luis Bunuel of our poetry:

I dreamed it was November 1930.
Walking east on Boulevard St-Germain
toward the Odeon, just past rue Kelver
(a cross street that in fact never existed),
in the middle of people hurrying (it was cold
and getting late), I saw a woman crouched
against a wall, bundled in a scarf and a cheap
light-blue overcoat. She held an accordian
that appeared to be made entirely of wood.
Its notes could have come from a muffled xylophone.
A glimpse of her small, half-turned away face
showed her to be at least eighty, which meant
she'd been born around 1850, if not earlier.
I felt exempted from my whereabouts,
carried back to the middle of the previous century.
The thought of her life coming forward from then
to this
particular moment in this city in this dream
I knew I was dreaming was like a pool of water
I wanted to reach into what glitters there,
But I could not stop to give her a coin – the money
in my pocket hadn't been invented yet.
– "Street Scene"

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When Adam Zagajewski's selected poems were first published in English in 1985, it was clear that he was a major poet. *Tremor* was a book that reminded one of other great contemporary Polish poets, Milosz, Herbert and Szymborska, especially in its preoccupation with history and its love of irony. It was equally clear, however, that Zagajewski is an original voice. This new, well-translated collection confirms it. His subject, if one could generalize about a poet so intellectually complex, is the epoch's end. Not solely the end of a long and murderous century, but the death of ideas that underwrote all our now failed utopian projects:

> dreams and imagination
> homeless and mad.

Philosophically and imaginatively we are once more homeless. We are once more jailbirds from every Garden of Eden of every lofty idea. Who could still be a follower of Hegel or Neitzsche in this age? Perhaps some professor, but not a poet. The ode is dead; long live the elegy! The past is like the tenement window in Zagajewski's poem called "A Warm, Small Rain."

> actors appeared,
> from your dreams and my dreams;
> I knew I was en route to the future, that lost
> epoch – a pilgrim trekking to Rome.

"Things, do you know suffering?" Zagajewski asks. Things, mute witnesses to our lives, obsess all three poets. The mystery of the object is like the mystery of a closed door that we have no way of opening. We can only ask it questions. Zagajewski asks many difficult questions in his poems. For instance, how have evil and beauty lived side by side, and continue to do so even today? Here is how he begins his poem "Lava":

> And what if Heraclitus and Parmenides
> are both right
> and two worlds exist side by side,
> one serene, the other insane; one arrow
> thoughtlessly hurtles, another, indulgent,
> look on; the selfsame wave moves and stands still.

"How unattainable life is," he says in a poem. For a poet for whom philosophy begins with the "simplest apple, inscrutable, round," each poetic image is the evidence of the unattainable, the place where the real and the imaginary collide, "nail scissors/ three thousand years old." In his book of essays, *Solidarity Solitude* (published by Ecco Press), Zagajewski

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makes a point that is central to his work. He says: "Man's personality possesses something untamed, mysterious, divine, unhistorical, undomesticated, something that speaks quietly in art, in religion, in the search for truth, and it is exactly that delicate something that is the hunted animal, preyed upon by Political Systems and their countless conformities as well as by the conformities produced spontaneously by a collectivity." Listen to this fine poem:

> Evening, the edge of the city, a whole day
> of void, then all at once
> the late feast: the Sanskrit of dusk that speaks
> in a glowing tongue of joy.
> High overhead flow cigarette firelets
> no one is smoking.
> Sheets of blazing secrets aflame;
> what the serenely fading sky tells
> can't be remembered or even described.
> So what if Pharaoh's armies pursue you,
> when eternity is woven
> through the days of the week like moss
> in the chinks of a cabin?
>
> -"Late Feast"

CHARLES SIMIC

New Poetry

PERDIDO. By Chase Twichell. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $16.95.
THE SACRAMENTS OF DESIRE. By Linda Gregg. Graywolf Press. $14.95.
COMMONWEALTH OF WINGS. By Pamela Alexander. Wesleyan/University Press of New England. $20.00.

Chase Twichell has discovered in her new book, *Perdido,* the knack of getting right to the point, apparently reflecting the belief that "it's easy to lie with metaphor." "Before I knew that I would die," the first poem in the book begins, and this plunges instantly into a scene where the intensity of love puts an end to "my willful ignorance of death." I found myself wondering why so many other poets seem by contrast to stalk and circle their subjects. The title of the poem, "Why All Good Music Is Sad," illustrates the same winning forthrightness, though it's admittedly a

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bit hard to follow the poem's logic that allows the poet to assert, "That's why all good music is sad."

The worldly-wise sensibility sharply articulated here reminded me at times of La Rochefoucauld, in whose world the following observations from "Chanel No. 5" would not be out of place:

> the honeymooning couple
> at the table next to mine
>
> caressing with their voices
> the still folded map of their future,
> their two armies still in reserve,
>
> the flowers massed between them
>
> a flimsy barricade
> against their wakening grief.

I know of no contemporary writer in any genre who evokes eros so convincingly as Chase Twichell does:

> I tugged the tails of his shirt
> out of his pants and slipped both hands
> up the ladder of his back,
> for which he opened a look at me
> that made the muscles of my body swim
> like a school of quick fish, flinching as one . . .

Sensuality appears, though, not purely as an end in itself; sex is, in these poems, "the hook that drags death into the story."

In *Perdido* she dramatizes the sensations of an emotional and erotic life fully pondered. She also conducts, in a poem like "The Blade of Nostalgia," a severe examination of facets of mental life. "When fed into the crude, imaginary/ machine we call memory," she asserts, "the brain's hard pictures/ slide into the suggestive/ waters of the counterfeit."

I am an admirer of her previous collections, *Northern Spy* and *The Odds;* but in the diamond-sharp poems of *Perdido,* and particularly in the long poem at the end of the book, "The Stolen Emblem," Chase Twitchell has stunningly defined the seriousness of her mission.

Linda Gregg is a writer whose approach is so delicate, whose style is so limpid, that the tone of voice in her poems is everything. In this respect she resembles Hemingway: her reliance on the syntax of the

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declarative sentence reminds me very much of his prose style. *The Sacraments of Desire* divides itself into four parts, of which Part One is clearly the most successful.

Some of the later poems in the book suffer from vagueness and portentousness of diction: "Poetry is the voice of what has no voice/ to tell the difference between sand and dirt, rocks/ and heat, life and death, love and the other thing." But does she counter this puffy diction with a sense of humor? "You ask about the men in my past and it makes me think/ of Rome falling." I'd like to think this is meant to be a send-up, because later in the poem these lines occur: "It is true that I have worshipped trees. I have been praying/ to whatever I can get. . . . I tell you this/ because you love me and have such a serious mouth and eyes."

Gregg has an affinity for Greece, where the first section of poems is set. When she is in harmony with the landscape and the understanding of life she finds there, she writes poems that refresh and purify the mind and the senses with the white geometries of a Greek temple. The first poem, "Glistening," begins with well water – a perfect image for the classical simplicity of this fine poet at the top of her form:

> When I pour it
> over my body that is standing in the dust
> by the oleander bush, it sparkles easily
> in the sunlight with an earnestness like
> the spirit close up.

Early on in these poems set in Greece, the capitalized feminine pronoun starts to appear. In "On Lesbos Remembering Her Mountain on Paros," for example, Gregg writes, "I look for Her in a bean field near this crude house,/ watch for Her on sides of hills facing the sea." With the mention of Lesbos one might suppose Gregg had Sappho in mind – and that association is relevant. But what emerges is a more inclusive representation of the Muse and goddess. I like the forthrightness with which Gregg delineates this goddess: "If Her skirt does not bend the grass, nor sea air/ mold Her shape while She is happy, there is no grace./ I will not stop looking for that." In her poem she rejects the conventional representation of the goddess, with "A diadem and curly hair with bits of gold/ and white and red paint," saying:

> A rock would do
> as well, or some broken weeds. Why not the smell
> of earth warmed all day by the sun, or the sense
> of unseen water underground, or the sky at morning?

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Gregg's Muse is, then, a goddess of the earth.

The resemblance between Gregg's poetry and archaic Greek poetry has been commented on. A quality for which I value her work enormously is her attempt to write the pure, perfect lyric. "How You Can Know Her" comes pretty close to that ideal:

> Neither with nor without a lover
> Neither singing nor silent. She is either
> putting on or taking off her clothes.
> The water is for bathing, for washing the porch.
> The house is either hers or she is a stranger
> standing hidden in the trees waiting to be called.
> She will walk easily to the door or run away.
> She is either clothed in night or naked
> in white silk. If she has jewelry it was given.
> If not, she doesn't mind.
> She carries a love in her as a rose has its scent.

Only the conventionality of the last image detracts from the perfection of this lyric.

Pamela Alexander calls her *Commonwealth of Wings* "an ornithological biography" of John James Audubon. The poems are written in Audubon's voice, sometimes quoting, sometimes paraphrasing. "My goal," she states in a note, "was that my language take on the color of Audubon's so that the reader would find the poems seamless." She has succeeded. Though not familiar with Audubon's diaries and letters and never even having read a biography of the man, I found myself convinced by the plausibility and consistency of the voice. Though it was slow going in the early stages, I warmed to this book, won over by the emergence of personality behind the words.

Free verse generally bores me; I like the musicality of rhyme and meter, and I like to see the poet balancing the challenges presented by meter, stanza length, and choice of rhymes with the strength of voice and argument. But free verse serves Pamela Alexander well in this project. Part of it, I think, comes from the suitability of adapting her prose sources into free-verse rhythms, which are themselves essentially prose rhythms. The simplicity and materiality of satisfying physical work, for example: "I built it, with my sons, a secluded house/ of many rooms, riverfronted, bluff-backed/ haven, verandahs all around . . ." I am delighted by how she varies the lengths of her phrases, and how the rhythm becomes metrical here when Audubon writes about a Scotsman whose drawings seem to have put the notion of his own eventual life's work into the great natural-

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ist's mind:

> Today the stranger
> is gone, & the querulous flute from his room
> late at night. Rozier sulks. The man's a mule.
> I'll put this business on his back.

The uneven lines and abrupt line-breaks add emphasis to prose meanings: "Within inches of the sill/ the nesting Wren takes ants and spiders,/ still struggling, from her mate's bill."

What sounds to modern ears like eccentricity in word-choice, a certain quirkiness of attitude that Alexander finds in Audubon – both qualities are well adapted to this poet's elbowy slyness and delight in human engagement with the natural world:

> I have pressed my bootsoles
> into mud & moss & dry leaf duff, improvising paths
> in rangy curvilinear abundance
> as I followed my whim
> & joy, that flew ahead, half-seen.

Pamela Alexander seems a keen birder herself, and surely something of her own voice speaks through the voice of our most famous ornithologist and lover of this continental wilderness which we have so roundly abused:

> I know them, their shapes & movements, their differing attitudes
> of being still. I dream of balancing on the air
> & when I wake it is to their noise, musings
> that lift to raucousness. I have followed them
> where no other man has gone, have shot
> & ate them, or pierced & posed them on wires for Drawing,
> have named them and made them famous.

In Alexander, John James Audubon has found, a century and a half on, a worthy interpreter of his unsentimental, fiercely particularized engagement with these curious creatures that delight the observer's eye as they shelter among leaves and negotiate between earth and sky.

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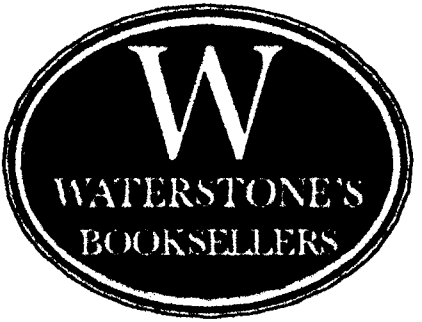

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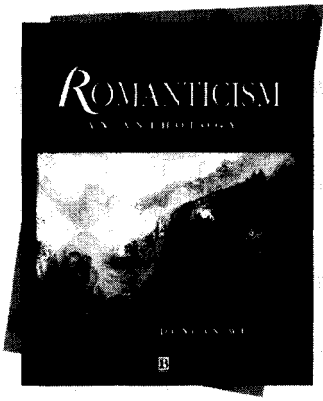

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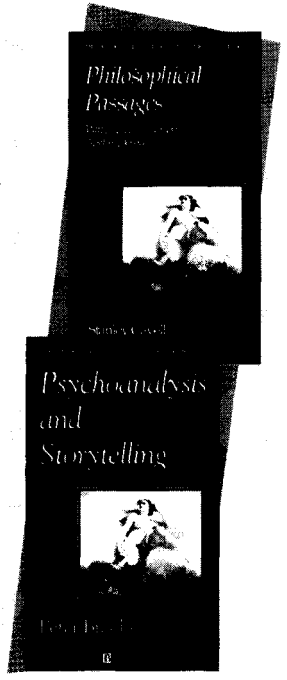

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